

AN ORDEAL *of* HONOR

ANTHONY PRYDE



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AN ORDEAL OF HONOR

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I.

IT was nine o'clock of a June evening, and the chalky road that leads from Amesbury to Stanton Mere was well-nigh deserted. The red sun had gone down into a bank of vapor; a brown twilight was creeping on even over the uplands, while in the folds and dimples of the Plain it was already dark. From some way off came the bleating of folded sheep, grey as a handful of pebbles on the shadowed hillside. After the heat of the day there was a chill in the air, the chill of dew showering down its cold drops over the parched, sunburned turf. Lying off the road, grey and dim and vast, the ageless altars of Stonehenge stood bare to the evening wind.

On a bank by the side of the way, under the shelter of a grove of beech trees, stood a young girl, nineteen or twenty years of age, holding up a bicycle whose wrenched handle-bars and twisted pedals told a tale which was confirmed by the streaks of chalk on her clothes. She wore a Norfolk blouse and short skirt of dark blue serge, and a linen collar and knotted tie. In person she was small, very slight, and pale; not pretty at a first glance, but attractive, on a second consideration, for the way she carried herself, and for her vividly blue eyes. Young as she was, the latent drollery in those eyes, together with a certain finished trimness which marked her dress and movements, saved her from looking immature. She wheeled the bicycle three steps forward and three back: it moved stiffly, and with a groaning of

wounded machinery. Your true philosopher, however, looks for a silver lining to every cloud.

"Ten miles to walk, and it will be dark in half an hour!" she said aloud. "Here's a unique opportunity for a Romantic Occurrence: why doesn't some one young and charming appear and pick me up?"

As if fate had overheard the challenge, there came at that moment, from behind a bend of the hills, the hoot of an approaching car. The young girl looked back, but with a doubtful aspect. "Motoring people aren't nice except to other motorists," she reflected; "they always might tow you up a hill, and they never do. Besides," with a disparaging glance at the road, which was little better than a cart track, "the man at this wheel must be mad."

As she said it, the motor swung round a corner and came into sight: a big open car in green and silver, the glare of its great lamps flaming out like searchlights. Empty except for the man who drove, it came racing up the hill at top speed, with the ease of power held in restraint, till it was abreast of the bicycle: there it halted.

"I see you've had a spill. Have you far to go?"

"Nearly ten miles."

"Where to, if I may ask?"

"Stanton Mere."

"I'm going there myself. Of course you'll let me take you on."

He stopped the car and jumped out. She did not answer at once, but stood with her hands on her handlebars, frankly trying to read his features. Divining her thought, he stepped forward into the lamplight and faced her, bare-headed and smiling. He was a very tall man, and had a thick crop of chestnut hair, cut close to his head: his eyes and skin were brown as well—the latter a kind of light coffee color—and he carried himself like a soldier.

"My name is Charles Auburn, and I assure you I'm respectable. I dined with a bishop one day last week."

"Thank you. But what about my bicycle?"

"It will go in the tonneau."

He took it out of her hands and lifted it over the side of the car. "H'm!" she thought, "Monsieur likes his own way." Monsieur was evidently sure of getting it, for his next act was to adjust the wind-screen. "You aren't dressed for motoring, are you?" he said, with a glance at her light coat, "but you won't get much wind here in front. Jump in and let me tuck you up."

"Mad—a little mad—but thoroughly business-like," reflected the philosopher, getting in. She was made to sit down while he wrapped the rug over her, tucking it under her chin and behind her back: it was of leather, lined with thick, soft fur, and comfortably warm. Her companion wore only a holland coat, very dirty, over his light grey summer clothes. When the tucking-up was accomplished, he had to wrestle with a loose nut, and she with an inclination to laugh. The Romantic Occurrence was actually taking place in the very form she had designed for it, but the romance seemed, as so often happens, to have evaporated. A little jeering smile came to her lips: he raised his head, caught her in the act, and smiled gaily back. "What's the joke?" he asked.

"Entirely against myself," she replied.

He nodded, pulling on his driving gauntlets, and took his seat by her side. "By the by, you aren't nervous, are you?"

"Oh no, not at all."

She soon found that it was as well, for he was not a cautious driver. Over ruts, over stones, they topped the hill and fled along the level as if the Prince of the Powers of the Air were at their heels. For some minutes the strong rush of the car and the shriek of the cloven wind fascinated her into silence, but when she realized that they were not doomed to instant perdition, she began to think of explanations.

"This is very good of you. I thought I should have to spend the night on the Plain. I hope my bicycle won't make your cushions muddy."

"Why? I shan't have to clean them. They will provide Piers with an hour's innocent recreation. He valets me and the car, and he gets very sick because I don't give him enough to do."

"Oh, you have a valet, do you? H'm. You won't stay in Stanton Mere."

"Why not?"

She laughed, but declined to explain. "He certainly is unconventional," she reflected, "but I mustn't play up to him." Aloud she said, "I've had a chapter of accidents. I ought to have been home by eight, but my tire burst just as I rode out of Amesbury, and I had to go back and get it mended. They hadn't one to fit, so they put on a rubber bandage, and bound me over not to use the front brake. But as I rode down the hill I became so absorbed in the Ancient Britons——"

"You don't live at Stanton Mere, then?"

"As a matter of fact, I was meditating about summer clothes."

"Ah! don't edit yourself, I beg," said Auburn, laughing. "I'm sure you can afford to be frank."

He turned to look down at her, "as if I were an individual and not a genus," she reflected with satisfaction. "Come, we're getting on!" By which she meant that he was beginning to take an impression of her small, keen, vivid individuality—an individuality which had for some years reigned unchallenged over a houseful of elder brothers. "You weren't hurt?" said Auburn.

"No, I came off on the grass: but the bicycle was very sorry for itself. I should certainly have had to lead it home."

"I'm glad I found you."

"So am I," said she. "It's bad enough as it is, for we've

some one coming to supper, and there won't be any supper till I'm there to cook it. I soon shall be, though, at this rate. How fast are we going?"

"Oh, scarcely twenty-five," said Auburn carelessly; "it's such a bad road. Fine country, though, isn't it?"

It was fine country: growing wilder and wilder with every mile as they raced along between the flying shadows. It was by now almost as dark as a June night can be, and they could see nothing in detail of the hills beyond their giant contours, standing out from each other and from the dimness of the sky in nameless shades of gloom. Bathed in the white light of the great lamps, the chalky road stretched away ahead of them, bordered by the close black sward of the moor: but near at hand the turf was still pale with a multitude of early flowers, out of which the swarthy squat trees of juniper started up, like lean dwarfs dancing. "Yes, it is fine country," Auburn repeated. "I like this place."

"And so do I."

"Do you know it well?"

"I was born in Stanton Mere."

"And you've lived there all your life?"

"I've been away on visits."

Auburn looked at her for a long moment, making—who knows what comparisons between her life and his own?

"Ah well," he said, "you're lucky."

"Do you think so?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I should hang myself in six months, but then I'm used to knocking about. I've never had an abiding city since I went down from Cambridge. But your sort of life is the right thing for a woman, isn't it?"

"Oh certainly, for a nice woman," assented his companion: and she went on fluently and with a curious sing-song intonation: "Because of course home is the woman's sphere, and it is only by devoting herself to her domestic

duties and the simple everyday requirements of family life that she can hope to attain real and lasting happiness."

"Here endeth the first lesson. It's all very well for you to scoff, young lady, but I'm beginning to feel desperately inclined to go back to town—unless you're able to reassure me. If the Carminow family is half as Puritanical as the Carminow landscape, what the dickens shall I do in that galley?"

"The who?"

"Mr. Carminow and his sons. Your vicar."

"Do you know the Carminows?"

"I have that pleasure. Why not?"

"Oh no, why," she answered, though the flatness of her voice betrayed her extreme surprise, "it's only the smallness of the world. Of course I know all the boys, and have done for ever so long. But why do you want reassuring?"

"Merely because I had meant to ask them to put me up for a night on my way down into Hampshire, and I'm beginning to wonder what sort of reception I shall get. If I'd known what this place was like I'd have sent a wire—no, a letter—to say I was coming. Will they be civil to me, do you think?"

"Did—did anybody ask you?"

Auburn smiled: the smile widened irresistibly into a laugh. "Unsophisticated as I may appear, I should hardly plant myself upon strangers without some sort of invitation. I met Caron and Roden Carminow in Paris, and they told me I might look in upon them next time I was down their way. So I took them at their word."

"You met them in Paris? You—you were the Mr. Auburn they met in Paris? Of course, that accounts for it! I thought your name sounded familiar. Oh, I've heard them speak of you! Why, you were at Moussin's, weren't you? You've been half over the world?"

"And back again," said Auburn, still laughing, "and I've come to the conclusion that one half is very like the

other. Apparently you don't agree with me, but may I ask what on earth there is to be so keen about?"

"Everything on earth," she retorted with spirit, "that's the point of it: but I suppose one can't expect a man to admit he isn't bored. Oh, what wouldn't I give—*what* wouldn't I give to go where you've been?"

"You will some day," said Auburn idly. Her face was lit and transfigured with excitement, and her eyes were as blue as steel: and her companion, who concealed beneath his languid airs a remarkable taste and talent for getting into mischief, felt himself drawn towards her—incredible though it seemed—as a kindred spirit. Auburn at thirty-five preserved towards most women the attitude of the typical schoolboy, detached, incurious, tinged with suspicion: his relations with them had been of the gayest and most transitory type. He believed it to be a fact that no man can ever hope to understand a woman, and that friendship between man and woman is an impossibility, and that no woman likes to hear another woman praised. He disliked the veiled language, the restraint of manners imposed upon him by their presence. As only son and a wanderer born, he had never been thrown into close relations with women of his own class, and although he had had, as he phrased it, to play the game of social life from time to time in most of the capitals of Europe, he much preferred to get away from salon to smoking-room, where he could do as he liked and say what he liked, and indulge a native genius for running up intimacies without fear of an emotional outbreak. Here, however, was a spirit that appealed to him as a counterpart of his own, an adventurous, gay, open-air temperament, keen in action, indifferent to questions of sex. He liked her for her keenness, and liked her no less when a moment later she was laughing at herself.

"Dear, dear, how artless of me! I'm so sorry, but you shouldn't talk travel to any one of us—we're all rather mad on that point, and, though you mayn't think it, gen-

erally I'm the sanest. I was brought up on proverbs about cutting your cloth and saving your breath, and it isn't often that my feelings run away with me. So you're going to the Carminows? That's very amusing. Suppose they haven't a room?"

"Then I shall have to fall back on the coal-cellar."

"Then Bernard will suspect you of wishing to steal the coals."

"Then he can have the coal-cellar, and I'll have his room."

"Excellent! I should admire to see Bernard's face when you explain your intentions. But don't you think you'll be bored?"

"Shall I? Very likely. But I'm willing to immolate myself on the altar of friendship. I'm rather fond of Roden," Auburn added, as the car wheeled round a sharp turn at a perilous angle. "He's too good for this wicked world."

"Too good for this wicked world? Roden?"

"Don't you think so?"

She paused before replying, and the management of her voice suggested that she could not easily find words at all. "I can't say it ever struck me in that light, but I dare say he is, if you say so. Indeed, I've often noticed that it's always he who goes to the wall. It's so hard to look after the unobtrusively unselfish. Besides, he would be so annoyed if you did."

"Oh, he's a saint of the first water," said Auburn seriously, "not milk and water, either, which is rare in saints. I was with him once in the thick of a row—a Latin Quarter row, all long-haired students and anti-clerical *ouvriers*—and from the scientific way he hit out at them you'd never have dreamed he was in the British army. All the same, I've seen him—er—change the conversation at Moussin's. What are the other Carminows like?" It had evidently

occurred to the speaker that he would do well to change the conversation himself.

"Caron you know. He generally gets on better with women than he does with men, because they don't resent his personalities. Bernard I don't expect you'll like. Nobody ever does. He's reliable, but unpleasant."

"Delightful combination! I hate reliable people."

"Dickie is a dear donkey. Mr. Carminow is very nice-looking and has charming manners—the best manners of the family: I dare say you'll call the others provincial, but not him. He's keen on art, and never talks shop."

"Really? I thought he was rather a bad lot."

"You thought *what*?"

"I beg your pardon, I forgot he was probably a friend of yours," Auburn apologized humbly. "But when I was in Abyssinia last autumn I met a man who said he'd been at Oxford with an Alwyn Carminow who was a trifle gay, and this chap ranged himself afterwards and turned into a model parson. Probably it wasn't the same man."

"He might have been wild at Oxford. He isn't now."

Her wrath was still visibly hot within her, and Auburn decided to change the conversation again. "And the child—what's she like?"

"The who?"

"The child—the little girl. Roden said there was a little girl. He described her as plain but intelligent," Auburn continued, blind for his sins to the startled expression of his companion, and her unquenchable desire to laugh. "But that may have been fraternal partiality. You might tell me what she's like, and whether I shall be expected to kiss her: I always want to have a *carte du pays* before going into a strange house."

"I would if I were you, another time."

Auburn awoke—too late, as usual—to his own immeasurable indiscretion. "For heaven's sake tell me what you mean!"

There came a glint of pure wickedness into his companion's great infantile blue eyes as she raised them to his horrified face. "I am afraid she is rather plain," she said with tolerable steadiness: then giving way altogether—"but nobody will expect you—ha ha! Oh, I *am* so sorry! It *was* your fault, you know!"

II.

STANTON MERE was a considerable village lying under the knees of the hills an hour's drive west of Salisbury. The tall, spired church occupied a triangular patch of greensward in the middle of the High Street, and the Vicarage, conveniently near at hand, lay back behind a grove of chestnuts, the smoke of its red chimneys going up under the grassy cliffs that wall the crannies of the Plain. It was a large, rambling house, full of open windows and shabby furniture: "so Bohemian," as Mabel Blandford remarked: "no proper drawing-room, and the most indelicate undraped statues wherever you turn your eyes." These were clay models from Caron's versatile hand.

On the night of Auburn's arrival the family were gathered in the studio, a large, light room facing west and north, and used by Caron for painting and by the others for reading, smoking, and strumming on the piano. It was strewn with books, music, unfinished canvasses, plaster casts, and all the paraphernalia of the arts: in one corner stood an articulated skeleton clad in a Turkish fez and green muslin breeches: the lid of the grand piano supported a work-basket full of socks, a hunting-crop, and *The King's Mirror*, open face downwards. The walls were distempered white and decorated with bold designs in charcoal: on one a frieze representing Mr. Carminow in clerical dress dancing with the Nymphs and Graces, on another a collection of profile heads of the family and all their friends at varying ages. Through the tall western windows, open down to the ground, came in the soft gloom of the night, the smell of

moorland turf and of lemon-thyme and heliotrope in the garden.

Mr. Carminow stood by the window: a tall, slender man, with an oval face, a brilliant skin, and the same striking blue eyes that shone through Dodo's curling lashes. Younger son of a younger son, and sent to Oxford *en route* for a family living, he fell into a fast set, forsook Divinity for Art, ran heavily into debt, and was distinguished as one of the most charming, witty, idle and dangerous men of his year, till one day he looked into a woman's dark eyes, and (in his usual headlong fashion) remembered heaven. It was no less than a conversion. Working day and night, he took his degree, renounced the family living in favor of its beloved and hard-working curate, and retired to Canning Town, where he was shortly joined by his wife. Agnes Wray was a saint, a mystic, a dreamer of dreams, had no sense of humor, and was devoid of practical intelligence. For six months after his marriage Mr. Carminow dined alternately on leg of mutton and sirloin of beef. She could carry forests on her back—wrestle with the devil for a dying soul—but she could not crack the nut of daily house-keeping. Mr. Carminow had to do that, and satisfy his Oxford tradesmen out of the kernel.

After three years his health gave way, and they left Canning Town for Stanton Mere, with a stipend of £250. Rates, bills, and babies kept them struggling in deep poverty, and shortly after Dodo's birth, when the last claim was paid off, Agnes Carminow was translated to the world in which she had always held a spiritual citizenship. Her husband and children had adored her and laughed at her: she had returned their adoration and smiled in a puzzled way at their laughter, and her loss blackened their sun in heaven, and reduced the weekly bills by a third. Mr. Carminow recovered of his wound but slowly: still time did not fail to work its blessed miracle, so that after nineteen years he could bear to hear her name spoken without an intoler-

able pang. But her influence had been incalculable. Of that early wildness, notorious enough to become a tradition, no trace remained, unless it were in an increase of wisdom and strong gentleness when Alywn Carminow had to deal with sin. She could not make him a saint—he was proud, hot-tempered, and incurably Bohemian: but for all that he was a model parish priest.

Near him, on a wide sofa, lounged Caron, artist and cripple, the dark beauty of his features marred by their look of reckless discontent. He had rooms in town, but ran down pretty often from Saturday till Monday. He was on the staff of the *Cartoon*, and his black-and-white work was familiar in the illustrated papers over the signature of "Quasimodo." Bernard, the eldest, sat by the hearth reading a work on agriculture: a tall, powerfully built man, with dark eyes and a cold manner. He farmed the glebe, was agent to Lady Richarda Harewood, and annoyed his family by living at home. Dickie, the third son, was at the piano, trying to pick out a tune from the *Duke and the Damsel* with one finger high in the treble. Dickie was in a Line regiment, where he had learned little except to square his broad shoulders and take his long limbs out of other people's way. He was so fortunate as to be quartered on Salisbury Plain, within riding distance of his home, in one of the iron shanties provided by a paternal War Office for the use of unmarried officers. He never lost his temper and never ran into debt, and Roden said of him that he had more legs and less brains than all the rest of the family put together. The only lady present was Miss Grace Trevor, daughter of Sir George Trevor, J.P., M.P., and Dodo's chief ally: a well-drilled, boyish-looking girl with brown hair and keen grey eyes, who wore white serge and a Panama hat, and carried a tennis racquet across her knees.

"Look here, you people," she was saying, "I believe you've beguiled me in here under false pretenses. It's getting awfully late! I shall go home."

"Tighten your waist-belt," suggested Caron; "it relieves the pangs of hunger—if you can, that is."

"Shall I go and forage?" Dickie inquired. "I know where the beer is, anyhow."

"I wish," said Mr. Carminow mournfully, "these domestic contretemps were not arranged by Providence always to coincide with Aline's evening out." Aline was the maid-of-all-work, brought home from a summer holiday in the Ardennes. "My dear children, listen! It's striking nine by the church clock."

Bernard raised his head. "That means ten past by station time. I expect she has met with an accident. The roads over the Plain are in bad condition, and she prides herself on riding down every hill."

Bernard's contribution to the discussion was received, as not infrequently happened, in a blank silence. It was Grace who first gathered spirit to retort.

"What rot, Bernard! She rides better than you do, anyhow." Bernard shrugged his shoulders and retired into his book. "I expect she's had a puncture and is wheeling her bike." With their usual happy-go-lucky optimism, everybody looked relieved. "Now if I go home, one of you might see me back, and trot on to meet her."

This proposal was received without enthusiasm. "Oh, she'll turn up all right," said Caron comfortably. "My dear girl, you were asked to supper and to supper you'll stay."

"How can I stay to supper when there isn't any supper to stay to?" Grace demanded, not unreasonably. "You see we dine at seven, and I really *am* hungry. I've been to the Blandfords' to tea, and you know the sort of sandwiches you get there."

"Too, too well," Mr. Carminow assured her. "But you might take two at a time."

"I do," said Grace, "but I should like to take forty-two. I know the Blandfords think it's unladylike to be hungry."

Lucky for me the governor's a J.P., and other frills," she added; "if he weren't, Mabel Blandford wouldn't know me. I do my little best to shock her." She leaned forward and tapped Bernard on the shoulder with her racquet. "Bernie! d'you know you're sitting on a basket of cherries?—Thank you. Have some, anybody?"

"Tell about the great Mabel," said Caron from his sofa. "Is she going strong? Last time I saw her she was wallowing in the ditch with her bicycle, and Val Attwood with his new Panhard was climbing up the bank in his anxiety to reassure her."

"She always gets off for a motor," said Miss Trevor. "I don't, but then I wear—I don't wear long flounced petticoats, like she does. What have you been telling her about Paris, Car? She said she was afraid you were a very dissipated young fellow."

Caron grinned. "I only told her about the supper in Auburn's rooms, after the first night of *Une Nuit*, when the Daguesseau came in her stage robes, and Romain crowned her with olive leaves. It was good fun, that supper," he added, clasping his hands behind his head, while he buried his crooked shoulders between two cushions. "I must say I liked Charles Auburn. He was rather mad, but quite nice. I wish he'd come down here, as he talked of doing."

"Perhaps he will."

Caron shook his head. "Not he! It was only a way-side episode to him. He knows half Paris. Hullo, here comes Roden! Your hat's crooked, Miss Trevor."

Grace set it straight mechanically, then looked annoyed, as the last member of the family stepped in through the tall window: a slim, fair, tired-looking young man, dressed in a rough coat and riding-breeches, and carrying his cap. He smiled at Grace, into whose cheeks the color had sprung, and sank with an air of fatigue into the nearest chair. "Hullo, Gracey, eating *still*?"

Lieutenant Roden Carminow, R.E., had returned in the

previous March from two years' service in India, and was at present enjoying six months' leave. He had brought home with him a touch of fever, a medal obtained in Tibet and kept in his collar drawer, and an unlimited capacity for doing nothing, which led him now to suggest that Dickie had better go and look after his horse. Dickie departed unmurmuring; Bernard also, after one angry, quiet glance from Miss Trevor to his brother, shut his book and went out, and Roden's grey eyes roved round the room inquiringly. "Where's the Babe?"

No one spoke for a moment. At length Mr. Carminow, beginning to look uncomfortable again, gave the necessary explanation, to which Roden listened in silence, pulling at his fair moustache. Finally, he dragged himself to his feet. "Why, where are you off to now?" said Mr. Carminow.

"I'll stroll up the road to meet her."

"But, my boy, you'll be so tired."

Roden glanced at the watch on his wrist. "It's five-and-twenty past nine. I'll see you home, Grace, shall I? I'm very sorry there's nothing to eat." Miss Trevor's face was eloquent of approval: there were times when the Carminow insouciance irritated her, as she divined that it was now irritating Roden. She jumped up.

"All right, let's go——"

"By Jove," said Caron, starting to his feet, "there's a car coming up the avenue!"

"Oh, dear me," exclaimed Mr. Carminow, "I hope there's nothing wrong!"

Caron hurried out through the window, and Mr. Carminow followed, dropping his hand on his son's shoulder, a characteristic action: for he could never face trouble alone. Roden and Grace went into the hall. A moment later they heard a car draw up, and then, to their great relief, Dodo's voice in cheerful conversation. As Roden opened the door she ran up the steps, while behind her they saw the dark outline of the car, and the glow of its burning eyes. A smile

lingered round her lips, as if she were turning over a good joke in her own mind: at sight of Roden this gave way to a subdued apologetic air.

"Hullo, Dodo, *there* you are! What on earth have you been up to? Are you hurt?"

"No. I'm awfully sorry. I've only fallen off my bicycle."

"I wish to heaven you wouldn't fall off your bicycle! Do you know it's nearly half-past nine? I thought you were killed!"

"I'm awfully sorry, Roddy! I will be next time—on my honor, I will!"

"Idiot!" said Roden with brotherly simplicity. "Come along in now and get the supper. We're all famishing."

"Are you famishing, Gracie? I really couldn't help it. It'll be ready in five minutes. There's pea soup, and jelly, and cold beef, and fruit, and I'm going to make an omelette," Dodo declared, throwing down her coat and hat and rolling up her sleeves. "Cut and lay the table, Roddy, there's a darling! Oh, and we'll have clean table napkins."

Roden raised his eyebrows. "These preparations!"

"Who brought you home?" asked Grace. "Eric Blandford?"

Dodo shook her head with a smile of irrepressible glee. "Somebody a good deal more interesting than the fair-haired Eric."

"The field is still rather wide," remarked Roden.

"A friend of yours, Roddy, and Caron's. I've never seen him before."

"I guess," said Grace.

Dodo gazed at her, startled. "Nonsense, you couldn't possibly! It's Mr. Auburn, Roddy, that you met in Paris. He's going down to stay with an old friend in Hampshire; and he wants us to put him up for the night."

"And are you going to?"

There was something quick and distrustful in Grace

Trevor's tone, which made both brother and sister look up in surprise.

"Going to? I should think so!" cried Roden. "Where is he—out in the car?"

"It's all right—father and Caron are with him. He's going to stable it in the coach-house. What's wrong, Gracie?"

"Nothing. Is he related to Sir Charles Auburn?"

"His son, I believe," said Roden. "Why?"

"Did you ever hear anything about Sir Charles?"

"Against him, do you mean? Not that I remember. What's he done?"

"I was only wondering," Grace said, drawing her fingers slowly to and fro across the strings of her racquet. "Father used to know Sir Charles when he was a young man. I wondered whether your Charles was any relation."

"Why, though?" asked Roden with lively curiosity. "Did he murder anybody?"

"I think not that exactly."

"Do you mean that he is a very bad lot?"

Grace nodded slowly, once or twice. "But of course that's no reason why your Mr. Auburn should take after him."

"Let me congratulate you, Gracie darling," said Dodo with strong though restrained asperity, "upon the first sensible remark you've made for some time."

Grace gave her a sidelong, meditative glance. "H'm, . . . you like him, I perceive," said she.

III.

“**D**ON'T you think we might just step in and have a cup of tea with the Carminows, dear? I haven't been there since I don't know when, and it does seem so unneighborly,” pleaded Mrs. Blandford, halting on the pavement with her mauve voile skirts clutched up at both sides and trailing on the ground behind her. Miss Blandford, a tall, fair, imposing young woman in pink cloth and silver braid, paused also, and glanced irresolutely from the glare of the sunny High Street into the cool shade of the Vicarage gateway. “You see I told James we should be out, so I'm afraid we shan't get any tea at all if we go straight home.”

“Mother, don't be so soft! You could ring him in, couldn't you? But we'll go here if you like—it'll save writing a note if we're going to ask some of them to Eric's ball.”

“I don't think it would be kind to leave them out: and after all, Mab darling, Mr. Carminow is our vicar, and very hardworking, and a gentleman, too, I'm sure.”

“Oh, I suppose we've got to have them—though I'm sure I don't know what dress Dodo's going to come in, unless she hires one,” said Miss Blandford ill-naturedly. “Nasty little stuck-up—oh, there they all are!”

The Vicarage stood with its back to the hills, whose lower slopes had been planted as an orchard. It was an old-fashioned red-brick house, with a porch at one side, and a long rectangular garden running down to the road and framed in trees. The studio windows looked out on a terrace of turf, bordered with flowers, their gay heads deli-

cately bright against a stone balustrade. A flight of steps led down to the lawn, which was walled off from Mr. Carminow's rhubarb and gooseberry beds by masses of white and purple rhododendrons. Rhododendrons, lilac, and syringa also served to screen the kitchen garden from the avenue: but from the lawn it was separated only by a gradual rise of grassy bank. The Blandfords therefore soon obtained a full view of the Carminow family, who had been playing tennis, but were now star-scattered on the grass, or on the steps that led up to the terrace.

"There's Caron and Dodo," said Mabel, lowering her voice as she stepped upon the lawn, though the Carminows were still happily unconscious of the honor impending: "and that on the grass must be Roden—goodness, I'm glad Eric doesn't wear his hats till the brim comes away from the crown!—and that's Dick with the disgusting pipe in his mouth, and another man that I don't know, and—who's that girl in the Panama? Oh, Grace Trevor! Well, I can't think why she should want to take up with the Carminows, after all her seasons in town; but Grace isn't a bit refined in her tastes, and she's so plain I shouldn't wonder if she was setting her cap at Dick—not that a Line subaltern would be much catch for a baronet's daughter——"

Here Dodo caught sight of them, and telegraphed the news to her family. "It's the Blandfords, and they've come to tea! Get up, Dick! Roddy, *ne sois pas un bête!*—Oh, make them get up, Mr. Auburn, do!"

They all did get up, though less rapidly than Dodo, who ran to Mrs. Blandford with a face all smiles. "Dear Mrs. Blandford, do come and sit down! Dickie's getting you a chair. How good of you to walk all this way on such a hot day!"

"Well," said Mrs. Blandford, who had a tendency to be honest in and out of season, "we didn't exactly come all over on purpose, because Mabel wanted to call on the Montgomery-Smiths, but they were out, so we thought we'd

drop in here for a cup of tea. I do seem to miss my tea so if I don't get it, specially after I've been walking, and Mabel likes me to walk because of my getting so stout if I only take carriage exercise."

"Who the devil are these people?" inquired Auburn of Grace Trevor, who had gone with him to fetch chairs while Dickie ordered tea.

"Rich snobs, who patronize the Carminows," was the laconic reply.

"Why do they stand it?"

Grace raised her eyebrows over such stupidity. "Because old Blandy would cut his parish subscriptions, of course!"

"Confound the parish!" said Auburn.

"Amen!" said Grace: and, having thus laid in mutual sympathy the foundations of a lasting friendship, they returned to the tea-table, where Auburn, introduced by Dodo to the visitors, wrapped himself up like the spoiled child that he was in distant and impenetrable gloom.

"There's always tea going in this establishment," Roden said, returning with the teapot. "Dodo keeps it on the hob all day, stewing—like cooks do. Of course, Dodo is a cook," he added unaffectedly.

"Oh, but I don't know that I should like it if it had stood so long as all that," said Mrs. Blandford, alarmed. "I've got such a very weak digestion, I shouldn't sleep a wink all night!"

"Ah! but the doctors all say nowadays that strong tea is the very thing for a weak digestion, don't they, Miss Trevor? There's nothing so strengthening as tannin; it tans the——"

"Did you find it very hot walking, Mrs. Blandford?" Miss Trevor asked, taking a neighboring chair, and pointedly turning her back on Roden. Meanwhile Dodo, seated at the tea-table, was giving her attention to the more important guest. "And how are you, dear Mabel?" she inquired sympathetically; "pretty well, I hope?"

Mabel never slurred over this question as light-minded people do, but replied to it conscientiously and fully, as one alive to its importance. "Well, pretty well, thank you, considering the weather. I held out till the thermometer went up to eighty, and then I succumbed. Yesterday I was prostrate—absolutely prostrate—with one of my racking headaches, but to-day I think I really do feel a little better. Oh, thank you *so much*," to Roden, who silently handed her a cup of tea; "no, no sugar, thank you, and please don't give my mother any, it's *so* bad for her, and she will take it, when she gets a chance."

"It must be very harassing," Dodo remarked, surreptitiously dropping two lumps into Mrs. Blandford's cup, "to be always having to look after one's mother. Buns, Roden."

"Have you been cycling much lately, Miss Blandford?" asked Roden. There were times when Roden's expression verged on the inane: it did so now.

"*Do* you know which of these cakes have currants in them? Oh, thank you *so much*.—No, I really haven't, we've been so occupied with preparing for my brother's coming of age. My father insists on making quite a grand affair of it. We're going to give a dinner to the tenantry——"

"The who?"

"My father's laborers and—and tenants, you know."

"H'm: yes, I see."

"And then at ten o'clock the lower orders retire, and we're going to have a little dance—quite a small affair—just a few of the county people, and some of Eric's friends from London. We do so hope you'll be able to come." Roden murmured polite but vague acknowledgments. "And will your friend be here on the twenty-eighth?" pursued Mabel, who was rather impressed by Auburn's Byronic airs.

"I hope not," said Roden. "He came for one night and he's stayed a week already."

"Yes, I shall," said Auburn, waking up. "Do say I may come too, Miss Blandford—I adore dancing."

"We shall be so pleased," said Mabel. "Gentlemen are always useful on these occasions. Of course we shall expect dear Dodo as well, though. Dorothy!"

Dodo had been wickedly plying Mrs. Blandford with cucumber sandwiches and sugar cakes, things in which her soul delighted, though she was not often allowed to have any. Leaving her to Grace, Dodo came back to Miss Blandford. "What is it, Mab? Oh, the dance! Yes, Mrs. Blandford was just telling me about it, and about the supper you are going to give to the mill-hands," she said in all innocence: then caught her brother's eye, and hurried on, like a skater who finds himself unawares on thin ice. "Thank you, I should like to come immensely, and I'm sure——" again she caught Roden's eye and a frown, and glided with no perceptible break into—"Dickie would, too."

"My father has engaged the military band from Countisford," Mabel said, benignly smiling, "so I hope the music will be good. We want everybody to be quite easy and informal, you know, and not be very stiff, or bother about their frocks. I daresay some of the girls will hardly be dressed at all."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Roden, with an intensely grave face.

"It's so kind of you to say so," murmured Dodo in a voice of honey. "I was just wishing I could afford a new frock, but now I shan't mind."

"You'll wear the one you came out in, I suppose? It'll do quite nicely," said Miss Blandford. "I shouldn't think of getting a new one."

"I shan't," said Dodo.

"You might just get it freshened up a little, you know. Did you hear Mrs. Jackson has just taken to dressmaking? A few yards of ribbon or lace—imitation would do——"

"What are you going to wear?" interrupted Dodo abruptly.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I should say have a pink satin. Pink is such a becoming color to fair people, and I'll lend you my pink topaz necklace to go with it. I think I see you," Dodo went on, partially closing her eyes and gazing at Miss Blandford through her eyelashes, "in a pink satin gown with a long, long Watteau train—yards long—standing at the top of the grand staircase and dispensing hospitality to all the county. You've no idea what a vision you would look!—Oh, must you go? I'm so sorry! But do, do take my advice and have the pink satin and the topaz necklace!"

When the Blandfords were gone, the others returned to tennis. Except Auburn, who was erratic in the extreme, they were all keen players: Grace a thorough sportswoman, Roden clever, cool, and steady, Dodo with unerring eye and wrist of steel, distinguished for her fast overhand services and screwy backhanders. But the harmony of the set was broken: Auburn was abstracted, and Dodo vicious: and the light falling dim, and Auburn having served a double fault over the guard-nets into the rhododendrons, the quartet broke up. Grace said she must go home, and Dodo and Dickie volunteered to escort her. Roden put on his jacket and sat down by Caron on the steps: Auburn, still clad only in his white shirt and trousers, threw himself down on the grass.

"Lord, Lord!" he said, "what a queer place this world is, ain't it?"

"It will be if you catch rheumatic fever," said Roden. "Put your coat on, old man, the grass is drenching wet."

"Let him alone," said Caron. "He won't catch rheumatic fever. He's the sort that never have a day's illness till they die—generally in lingering torments. Lie still and I'll draw you, just to take the taste of Mabel Blandford out of my mouth."

"I liked the way Dodo sorted that young woman," Roden said. "She hadn't a notion what the Babe was driving at, and I'm not clear myself, but she dimly felt it was something unpleasant."

"Why do you—forgive me if I am indiscreet—stand the Blandfords? They seem rather oppressive."

"They are good-natured people."

"So is my tailor."

"They subscribe."

"Does that carry with it the right to be impertinent to your sister?"

"Well, there's more in it than that," said Roden. He was lighting his pipe, but he paused and glanced down at Auburn, as if surprised by his manner. "You can't be rude to a man who planks down twenty guineas at the Easter offering."

"He'd go on doing it."

"Ah, you've intelligence," said Caron. "And there's more in it than that, though Roddy's sensitive delicacy prevents him from saying so. When my trouble began, old Blandy was awfully kind; he insisted on taking me up to all the biggest bugs in Harley Street. I nearly died of the process, and the family of the sense of obligation. It's against etiquette for a parson to refuse a favor."

"I own I dislike being under an obligation to people like the Blandfords," said Roden. "Still, one must be civil."

Auburn looked from one to the other: from the dark, scornful face of the artist to Roden's careless eyes. Which of those three—Roden, Caron, Dodo—was the most sensitively proud?

"I adhere to my original statement: the world is a queer place."

"A commonplace, don't you mean?" said Caron. "Oh, you—you plutocrat! You're only good to borrow money from. Auburn, on your honor, have you ever known what it is to be short of a fiver?"

Auburn grinned. "In Paris once, at the ripe age of twenty. I was in mischief: Sir Charles heard of it, and ordered me to decamp. I was interested, and stayed on: so, when quarter day came, *v' là cinq sous, Fanfan la Tulipe!* I thought of singing in the streets, but was dissuaded by my friends. Providence not having blest me with a melting tenor. Ultimately—I decamped."

"You might have pawned your rings," Roden suggested, eyeing with unveiled disfavor the magnificent emerald which flashed—his one vanity—on Auburn's brown hand.

"Or this," suggested Caron. He leaned forward and with the tips of his fingers seized and drew out a gold cross, which Auburn wore round his neck on a fine chain, the soft collar revealing it. A momentary anger darkened Auburn's face: he sat up, throwing off Caron's hand.

"Caron!" said Roden quickly, "don't be an ass!"

Auburn dropped back on the grass in the old attitude. "Caron, you have the curiosity of a woman," he said quietly. "That was given me by a man I used to know in Cuba, an American, a Roman Catholic: he was shot through the stomach and died in my arms."

"Sentimentalist!" said Caron unabashed. "I thought it was a lady. By the by, what had you been playing at in Paris to induce your father to stop the supplies? Sir Charles in the character of *censor morum* is new to me."

"I believe there *was* a woman in that. Oh, Platonic enough!" Auburn added, with an ironical glance at Roden, whose face was devoid of expression. "Give a poor devil his due, Roddy: you virtuous persons are so fond of jumping to Pharisaical conclusions. You're like Roland Carew—he reads the Lessons in church, and because I don't he believes me capable of breaking all the Decalogue: and the quaint thing is that I never saw a woman yet I'd like to spend a week with."

"In that case I don't see why Sir Charles interfered."

"Because it came to his ears that I was going in for

matrimony in earnest. He wants me to marry, but stipulates for a woman of good family, with plenty of money—the sort that would cut a figure in the county. He wrote and ordered me to leave Paris unless I could assure him that my intentions were not honorable. Does that strike you as unedifying? Ah! you don't know Sir Charles."

"While under the benign influence of the twilight hour, will you go a step further, and tell me why you invariably refer to the author of your existence as Sir Charles?"

"Oh, go to the deuce!" Auburn rose suddenly to his feet, picked up his racquet and coat, stepped past the inquisitive Caron, and ran up the steps. On the terrace he stood for a moment smiling down at them.

"I never discuss Sir Charles," he said lightly. "It's against etiquette."

"Queer!" said Caron in a philosophic tone. Roden grunted. "Don't you think it's queer?"

"Think what's queer?"

"The deliberate way he spoke."

"He had something to say, and he said it. I dare say that strikes you as queer."

"Witty, i' faith! But you like the fellow, don't you?"

"Oh yes, I like him. I shouldn't like my sister to marry him."

"No fear!" said Caron vulgarly. "He isn't a marrying man."

"No, he made that plain."

"Oh, that's what you think he made plain, is it? Confound his impudence, then! Why, Dodo's only a child!"

"Therefore a man in Auburn's position might think it wise to make his position clear."

After a pause Caron said slowly, "And you wouldn't desire him to marry Dodo in any case?"

"The son of old Auburn? No."

"No," agreed Caron, knocking the ash from his cigarette. . . . "Poor devil!"

IV.

“**I** WISH I looked nice, Gracie, but it's no good pretending that I do.”

It was six o'clock on the evening of the Blandfords' dance, but Dodo was ready betimes, having been invited to dine and sleep with the Trevors and go on with Grace in their brougham. Dodo and Grace were together in Dodo's room, a garret under the roof, beloved by her for its wide window-seat, where many a time she had sat alone with her own thoughts, while the stars hung like sparkling garlands in the sky, or the sunrise bloomed and withered over the valley-head and the hills' long curve: alone with the hills and the quiet sky, and absorbing from them a faith in that Eternal whose vesture they are. Dodo loved her shabby garret, and did not care though her carpet was threadbare, and the press where she kept her slender outfit could with difficulty be persuaded to open and shut. The gown in which Cinderella proposed to go to the ball was of a piece with these penurious surroundings: made of white silk and trimmed with cheap embroidery, it had never fitted, and was now as limp as a rag and as yellow as fresh butter.

“It is a wretch of a dress,” said Dodo with a sigh.

“It was a pity you couldn't run to having it cleaned instead of washed,” Grace agreed regretfully. “Oh, I do think things are stupid! Here I've gone and given seven guineas for a new satin, and I'm not pretty, and I don't care a hang about dances, and I've been to hundreds of ones

up in town, whereas you've only been to three, and you'd look so nice——"

"I've a good mind not to go."

"Oh, Dodo!"

"Yes, I know it's childish to mind; but I *do* mind," Dodo said, revolving mournfully before a dilapidated mirror. "I don't want a frock from Pasquin, but I do want to be average! I dare say there are girls who look fascinating in their old clothes, but I don't. I look plain and I feel plain, and feeling plain makes me feel stupid. I can't stand Mabel's expression, and—and—Mr. Auburn——"

"Mr. Auburn!"

"Well, you know, Grace, I don't suppose he's ever danced with a frock like this in his life!"

"It won't kill him," said Grace in iceberg tones. Dodo laughed.

"Am I a snob? He knows the world outside. Therefore, if he only gives me two duty dances—which is all I deserve, in this rag—I shall be annoyed. I wish my fairy godmother would—*Entrez!*"

"Behold a baggage for mademoiselle," said Aline, appearing with a large cardboard box in her arms; "it is ten pennees to pay."

"Tenpence? how awful! Thank you Aline." Dodo laid down the box, which bore no lettering except her own address. "It's something parochial, I expect." She whipped out a pocket-knife and cut the string. "Tissue paper! why, what in the world can it be? Why—*oh Gracie!*"

She stood transfixed: and so did Grace Trevor. Swathed in fold after fold of wrapping, there lay before their eyes a gown of white satin and lace, exquisitely fragile and extravagantly rich. Dodo stood speechless, while Grace, the energetic, unwrapped and lifted out this realization of a girl's dream. "Satin charmeuse, oh!" she breathed, "and real old rose point, or my name's not Grace Trevor! Oh, look!" From another wrapping she drew out a pair of

long suède gloves, from another an exquisite lace fan with jewelled sticks, from a third a pair of slippers too small for any foot save Cinderella's. "Oh, Dodo! oh, Dodo! I believe this is one of Pasquin's frocks. Oh, Dodo! who is it?"

As one of a dream, Dodo awoke. "Grace Trevor, do you know anything about this? The truth, mind!"

"On my honor, I know no more than you do yourself."

"You don't? Well, but, who can possibly——?"

She scrutinized the lid, shook out the paper, turned the box upside down and scrutinized that. Not one scrap of writing rewarded her. She examined the bodice; the maker's name, if it had ever been there was obliterated. "Try it on," said Grace.

Dodo flew into it, and thrust her small feet, of which she was rather vain, into the magic slippers.

"This is witchcraft," she said. "Why, it fits without a wrinkle!"

"Nearly," Grace nodded. "That's the way with clothes that are really well cut," she added out of the depths of considerable worldly experience. Grace was blunt and frank, a thorough country girl in all her tastes and ways, but her six seasons in town had left their mark for all that, and Dodo was used to rely upon that shrewd judgment, which had seen many men and things, and was not often deceived. "Of course these Empire gowns are fairly flowing, and you're so soft and slight you haven't any angles. Do you know what this must have cost, Dodo? More than my seven guineas."

"But who could have sent it?"

"Roden?"

"Roden never has a penny. No, it can't be any of the boys, bless them! they couldn't run to it. Seven guineas! Are you sure this lace is real?"

"Positive," said Grace with conviction. "My dear, you can't mistake old rose point for imitation Valenciennes! This is all made with the needle—every stitch of it embroid-

ered on the net. (And I wish," she added to herself, "I knew a shop where you can get an Empire gown in old rose point for seven guineas, O my innocent Dodo!")

"But who can have sent it?"

"Do you mean to say you haven't an idea—you can't think of anybody?"

"I have not the very faintest idea, and I can't think of——"

She stopped dead.

"Hullo!" said Grace.

Dodo was extremely white. "Here, help me out of it," she said abruptly. "It's all rubbish, you know.—I can't wear a dress that's dropped from the skies. It might be stolen goods!"

"But, Dodo, you don't mean——?"

"Don't bother me," said Dodo imperiously. "Unhook it, please: we shall be late for dinner. No—no, it's no use: I shan't wear it."

Vain to contend with her in this mood: Grace knew that from experience. The loyal friend was scarlet with vexation and regret, and the tears were not far from her eyes. What crotchet Miss Carminow had taken into her head, Grace could not guess: nor who the sender might be, nor whom Dodo might imagine the sender to be. Keen as she was, she never divined the secret arrow of certainty that had darted into Dodo's breast. Extravagant, fantastic, graceful, unpardonable—Dodo knew of but one head irregular enough to conceive and carry out such a prank. Soberly she hooked herself into the despised Japanese silk, while the satin charmeuse was laid back in its wrappings. It had done its work, however. Plain as her dress might be, apparently Dodo no longer felt plain: her pale cheeks bloomed, her eyes flashed vividly blue under her coronet of thick fair hair. When she was ready, and Grace had preceded her out of the room, she hesitated: an exceedingly naughty look came into her face.

"Oh, but it's serious!" she said aloud. "I oughtn't to. . . . If I do, and he did . . ."

"What?" said Grace from the stair.

"Nothing, darling," said Dodo. She snatched up the jewelled fan and ran away from her conscience.

One provincial dance is much like another. The Blandfords' big double drawing-room was over-heated, over-lighted, and imperfectly waxed: the military band was described by Roden as few and evil: but the *Moët et Chandon* was excellent, while Mrs. Blandford in green satin and Mr. Blandford in a fat white waistcoat diffused an atmosphere of jollity and kindness. Charles Auburn had danced with Mabel and shaken hands with Eric Blandford, and was now waiting for the Trevors' brougham, delayed by the incurable unpunctuality of Lady Trevor. Meanwhile he found amusement in studying the crowd.

Here and there he recognized a familiar face, for the Blandfords, rich, liberal, and genuinely kind, had made good their footing among the less reserved of the county dignitaries. Lady Ricky Harewood, grey-haired, Radical, eccentric, distinguished in black velvet and diamonds, had brought a handful of guests: her nephew Val Attwood, handsome and pleasant; her nieces, tall and languid, their clothes a reproach to the rest of the room; a noted politician, and an A.R.A. of thirty-five. The remaining forty or fifty couples were drawn from the neighboring countryside, with a sprinkling of soldiers from Amesbury, and of city men introduced by Eric. Probably Auburn's classification would have run as follows:—1. Ordinary people. 2. Not bad sort of people. 3. Absolute bounders. At five-and-twenty he would have given himself airs: at five-and-thirty he was gloomily urbane. He was amused to see Roden dancing with Louisine Attwood, the pair of them looking like foreigners. Louisine was tall and dark and handsome, a Londoner to her finger-tips. When they van-

ished on the eve of the Lancers, it crossed Auburn's mind to be sorry for Grace Trevor. While the set was forming, she, with Sir George and Lady Trevor, and Dodo Carminow, entered the room.

Auburn had been three weeks at Stanton Mere, and showed no inclination to go. Why he stayed was as vague to himself as to any one else. All he knew was that he liked the gay, shabby, careless house, where Middle Age had never been allowed to set foot. He liked Caron, with his passion for art and his queer, personal turn of conversation: he liked Mr. Carminow, painter, poet, musician, and model parish priest: he liked Roden, Dodo's ally, and he liked Dodo's gay youth and ironical eyes. He revelled in the long summer days that began with a dip in the river and ended with supper on the lawn. His own home life had not been a happy one: underneath his gay manner he was reserved to a fault, and never dreamed of boring people with his private affairs, unless they were both cheerful and trivial: with countless intimate acquaintances, he had scarcely a single friend. "I do know one man who would cry if I died, besides my tailor," he said once to Roden, who was startled by his bitterness. He stayed on with the Carminows because they offered him genuine kindness and affection. He was not given to self-analysis, and looked no deeper. As for Dodo, he was very fond of her, and did not choose to see her patronized by the Blandfords, but what of that? She was a child of half his age! He had seen thousands of women prettier than Miss Carminow, and his net verdict was that they bored him. He marry? He would as soon have gone to be hanged. Dodo was a pretty child, but not in his line at all. When she followed Lady Trevor into the Blandfords' drawing-room he was conscious of an odd, startled sensation, a thrill that set live pulses tingling in his finger-tips. That dress, good heavens . . . and those eyes!

He was at her side, waiting, while she shook hands with

Mabel Blandford: he ignored Mabel Blandford, he also ignored Grace Trevor, to the great edification of that young lady. "May I offer you a programme, Miss Carminow?" he said very ceremoniously.

Dodo took it from his hand and glanced at it. From the current set of Lancers to the last galop, "C. St. L. A." was scrawled right across it in a wandering but legible hand. Dodo studied it for a moment, biting her lips to hide a smile. Coolly she took up the tiny green pencil, coolly she scored a line across and across those impudent initials.

"I never allow any one but Roden to do that," she said.

"Oh, I didn't really expect to get them all," said Auburn.

"No? . . . How many did you expect?"

"Six or seven."

"H'm. . . . You *are* mad."

"How many may I have?"

"None . . . perhaps."

Auburn repossessed himself of the programme and signed his name to three waltzes. "I begin with shame to take the lowest room."

"Are you ashamed of yourself?" Dodo inquired. "I'm so glad. I feel sure you ought to be. No, you can't have the next waltz, I've promised it to Mr. Attwood, and here he comes. . . . You may have the one after this."

"How d'ye do, Mr. Auburn?"

The speaker was Louisine Attwood. Auburn stared at her for a moment without knowing her. She laughed a little and gave him her hand.

"Aren't you goin' to ask me to dance? Let us console each other among these barbarians. Unless you've found consolation already?"

Auburn was conscious of a flash of anger that could not be mastered, and that dictated his reply.

"Thanks," he said, "I have."

The Blandfords' garden sloped down to a little river,

which ran with a merry flow between moon-whitened banks of grass, or lingered under the darkness of summer leafage in deep, eddying gloom. Most of the dancers preferred to walk on the lawns under the lighted windows of the court, between trim parterres and strings of Japanese lanterns: not so Auburn. "Let's get out of this," he said, and Dodo made no demur, although it was dark under the alders by the river, and the ways were too verdurous to be good for satin shoes. For some time they strolled on in silence, Dodo's hand lying on Auburn's arm, while the river prattled to them with its clear voice like children talking, and the night smell of honeysuckle breathed in their faces. Dodo found in the situation an element of vague excitement, not to be defined, not to be ignored. They had been alone together many times, but in informal ways, for at the Vicarage one could never count on privacy: in their present relation there was a tenseness, due partly to the minor details of the scene—the isolating dark, this close contact, the very formality of dress—and partly to some nameless shade of constraint in Auburn's manner, which made her feel as though she had never been alone with him before. At length they came out of the dense gloom of a woodland walk into a mossy clearing, freckled with pale moonlight. "Dodo——" said Auburn.

"Sir?"

Bluntly, baldly, Auburn's emotions expressed themselves in words.

"Dodo, will you marry me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you don't want me to."

"I do."

"Not really. You're saying this half against your will."

"Dodo, how on earth——"

"Do I know that? Never mind: I do."

Auburn stood looking down at her with his hands in his

pockets. A beam of moonlight striking through the trees lit up every line in his dark, worn face, while it silvered to flaxen fairness the coronet of Dodo's hair, and bathed in its unearthly glow the pallor and smooth slenderness of her young shoulders and rounded throat. Thirty-five against nineteen is long odds to begin with, and a life spent in a country village is further handicapped by contrast with a gipsy experience of every capital in Europe. Matrimony means babies and butlers: Auburn was not fond of butlers, and had a rooted objection to babies. He liked a wandering life, men's society, and the atmosphere of a club. It's never the same when you're married: the one woman edges herself in and edges out the many men, the tried and true, the comrades of many a gallant fight.

"I do want you. I shouldn't ask you if I didn't."

"How many times have you said this before?"

"Never."

She raised her eyes, incredulous. "Is that really true?"

"Yes," said Auburn stiffly. "I don't tell lies, you know."

"But you don't care for me."

"I do," said Auburn with the same ridiculous baldness. The fluent protestations which he would have poured into Louisine's ear deserted him now: the only things he could have said were the things he dared not say, the eternal language of passion. "Dodo, I do love you: you might see that for yourself, I should think. It's true I didn't want to marry you, but I do now. I don't, as a rule, get on with women, but you've struck your roots deep down into me. I do want you: the Lord alone knows what I shall do with you when I've got you, but—but——"

"And if you don't get me?"

He essayed to laugh. "I dare say I shan't die of it. But"

"Let us sit down," said Dodo, scarcely less agitated than he, but schooling herself to an appearance of calm. There

was a seat in the middle of the glade, and she threw herself into a corner of it, her face in shadow, though a diaper of moonlight flickered in the breathing air over her silken ankle, her lithe, twisted attitude, and the whiteness of her arms and neck. "Do you realize, I wonder, how little I know of you? I don't even know your name."

"Charles St. Leger Auburn."

"Aged thirty-five: but that doesn't tell me much. It is of you that I know so little—you, yourself."

"I'll tell you whatever you like."

"You don't literally mean that?"

"I do."

"I may ask you what I like, and you'll answer me?"

"Fully."

"H'm," said Dodo, and was silent for a few minutes, reviewing the extent of her power. All circumstances considered, it was perhaps inevitable that her thoughts should be more taken up with him than with herself, with what he could give her than with what she could give him. Little used to self-analysis, she had given up the complex of her own feelings in despair, to turn curiously to the task of eliciting Auburn's. "When," she said, "did you first begin to care for me?"

"I don't know."

"When did you first find out you cared for me, then?"

"To-night, when you came into the room."

"Why?" He was silent. "Sit down here on the seat where I can see your face, and tell me precisely what you felt, for at present I don't understand you at all." She hardly expected him to obey, but he did obey, though his eyes were restless, and his attitude betrayed constraint.

"Precisely what I felt? Thou hast asked a hard matter. I felt an utter fool—I do still, if that's illuminative. I—you——"

"Go on."

"Don't slave-drive me, Dodo."

She threw out her long, slim hand and touched his arm. "It is what I mean to do. You're too reserved, Mr. Auburn: you want to pay your way everywhere in small change. I shan't take silver from you—don't think it: if you're too proud or too shy to be frank with me to-night, the bargain's off. I want the bottom of your sack."

"Can't I leave it to the imagination?" Dodo shook her small head. "Here goes, then! To begin with, I never wanted to marry any woman before. I've seen more beautiful women than you are, but they didn't attract me: I've liked a few women—not many—but I didn't care for them in that way. Most of them seemed to ask so much."

"So should I."

"Yes, but that's the—the deviltry in you."

"Merci!"

"And, as such, I like it."

"Do you like having all this dragged out of you?"

"I'm blessed if I care! You've got hold of me, Dodo, and that's the truth. You can do anything you like with me, if only——"

"You don't ask me to love you?"

"No, I only ask you to marry me."

"Tell me some more about yourself. You've lived a disgracefully idle life, I believe. Did you never have anything to do?"

"I was in the Guards for a couple of years."

"In the Guards?" He nodded. "Why did you go?"

"Family affairs made it desirable."

"Are you under the impression that you've answered what I asked?"

"Oh, *confound* it all! . . . I thought it best to clear out before—before it grew too hot to hold me. No, it wasn't my fault: but you've heard of Sir Charles and his ways? He was worse then than he is now, and his name was all over London. I thought I'd clear out of the road before any very bad scandal happened."

"Did any bad scandal happen?"

"Oh, Lord, yes—half a dozen."

"So bad that you would have had to resign your commission?"

"As to that I don't say. But one doesn't stay till one's kicked out."

"Tell me something about Sir Charles."

"You've heard."

"I've heard that he's a bold bad man. Grace Trevor shakes her head over him. But I don't know what he's been to you."

"My father," said Auburn concisely.

"What sort of father?"

"I am certain I can't discuss him without swearing, Dodo."

"I don't mind—much."

"Soit! on your head be it. I lived at home with him till I was fourteen, when I went to Eton. After that I was rarely at Auburn. I spent my holidays at Ferndean, the place next to ours, with some people named Carew. Young Roland—the son of the house—was and is rather a friend of mine. We were in the same form at Eton, and went up the school together. After that we went up to Cambridge in the same year, to King's. I had one grand row with Sir Charles when I was twenty-one: I've never been home since."

"Never been home since?"

"Never crossed the threshold of Auburn. After my time in the Guards I went abroad and did Europe pretty thoroughly: India, too, and Africa: America I've scarcely set foot in. Roland used to come with me till he married: he's a Devonshire man, with a strain of the Devonshire seafaring blood in him. That's all."

"What is your father like?"

"Big, handsome, genial: like me but better-looking—less of a gipsy, and more of a squire."

"What did he do to you to make you hate him so?"

"Scared me," said Auburn after a pause. With a private keenness of gratification Dodo saw that he had slipped into an easy vein of frankness, and was talking to her as naturally as if he were thinking aloud. "I was most horribly afraid of him, and that's the truth. Excessive fear is a brutalizing thing. I doubt if you were ever afraid of any one in your life: I never was, but of Sir Charles. All my early memories are connected with him, and uncommonly painful they are."

"What did he do to you?"

"He used to knock me about: but I don't think it was the actual lickings I cared for. It was what lay behind them, the diseased enjoyment of cruelty for cruelty's sake. I once saw him beat a dog to death. I mean that literally: he stood over it till it died. I saw him do it. It was in an old shed at the bottom of the garden; and I never went into that shed afterwards. I don't know that I should care to go into it now. Years later, when I was at Eton—when I was at Cambridge—I've woke up in the night and heard that poor brute howling."

"What a time you must have had."

Dodo's banal comment served the purpose, for which it was designed, of luring him on, while if she had said one word in ten of what she thought he would have fallen back instantly upon a lighter tone.

"I did have the very dickens of a time. I can see now how bad it was, which of course I couldn't then. It was lucky it didn't last another year or so, or there would have been permanent mischief done. . . . There is mischief." He had taken up Dodo's hand, and involuntarily his own locked itself closer and closer over it till the grasp became painful, while his voice dropped to a murmur. "There is something wrong in me somewhere: a kink in my brain, where Sir Charles is concerned. I can't judge him sanely: when I try to, incidents like that come between me and him,

and I lose myself in hating him. If I met him, I should have hard work to keep my hands off him. I remember, while I watched him laying into that poor brute of a dog, how I longed that I or some one else—preferably I—could take it out of him in the same way—could kill him, to be quite frank: and I don't believe that wish—however unedifying you may think it—has ever quite died out of me. I can't stand cruelty—Roland used to say I was like a woman in that: I want to pay it back, good measure, pressed down and brimming over. I can tolerate most vices—I'm not a puritan, haven't the right to be, Heaven knows,—but that kind of conscious, deliberate brutality makes me see red. I want it killed, that's all—dead out of the way, as I wish he were——”

“Don't, Charles, you're hurting me.”

“Good Lord! I'm awfully sorry, Dodo.”

“I don't care about my hand,” said Dodo. With one light movement she sat up, threw her arm round his neck, and laid her pale face against his face, so close that the long lashes of her closed eyes brushed against his cheek. “Do you want me, Charles? I know you do. I'll marry you.”

“I believe I ought never to have asked you. I'm sixteen years older than you are, and I've been in ugly places. I shall hurt more than your hand, child.”

“I don't care. I can bear pain,” said Dodo.

“Say you love me, or I swear I won't touch you.”

She had to bear pain then: an insurgency of feeling that was like the pangs of birth. All her nineteen years of cool, self-contained, passionless youth revolted against the burden so suddenly laid upon her, and struggled to escape. The Carminows were not an emotional family, and her life among them had never trained her to play her part in circumstances where strong feeling had to be not only suffered, but shown. With the knowledge that Auburn was in deadly earnest came also a sense of deadly lassitude and an intuition of the only way to evade him. Subtle and fine,

she slipped into, not away from, his arms, and looked up at him with her vividly blue eyes, derisive, alluring.

“Too late,” she said, “you’ve asked me to marry you, and I shan’t let you off. To be sure, you needn’t kiss me if you don’t want to.”

It was not what he wanted: he did not like it, even at the moment. But he would have been more, or less, than man if he had not taken up the challenge, and for the rest of that evening, by moonlight or by lamplight, waltzing on Auburn’s arm or strolling with him in the scented garden, Miss Carminow had leisure to appreciate the less exacting aspect of her new tie: Auburn’s hard-driven meekness, her own coquetry, Roden’s disapproval, the envy of Mabel Blandford, the raised eyebrows of Louisine Attwood, all that life at Stanton Mere had to offer of heady, and sparkling, and sour.

V.

“**G**RACE, are you in bed? Can I come in for a minute?”

Late as it was, and tired as she might have been, Grace had not gone to bed. She was brushing her hair by the open window of her bedroom, which, like most of the rooms at Trevor Hall, was more comfortable than elegant. Indeed, the solid plainness of the mahogany furniture, the dearth of flowers and knick-knacks, and the frieze of sporting prints that adorned the walls suggested rather a man's occupation than a girl's. Grace was thinking about Charles Auburn, and that with a clouded brow. He had been impenitently rude to Louisine Attwood, and had thrown over every other claim to dance five dances with Dodo Carminow and sit out seven. Very young gentlemen very much in love commit these extravagances, but not men of Auburn's age, class, and tastes: for the world is censorious, especially in country circles, and escapades of this sort are not viewed with favor except as the preliminary to a romantic betrothal. Inasmuch as Grace did not believe Mr. Auburn to have the remotest intention of marrying Dodo or any one else, the loyal friend was annoyed. She was cross with Dodo too—so reckless, so unguarded!—and had scarcely said a word to her since Auburn had placed her, hooded and drowsy, in the Trevors' brougham at two in the morning. But she could not help smiling when Dodo came in, looking abnormally young and innocent, and buttoned with big brass buttons into a red cotton dressing-gown which extended from her throat to her heels.

"Have a biscuit," Grace suggested, nodding hospitably towards an easy-chair. "They're in that box on the table."

"No, thank you, I had too much supper. Do you often feel hungry in the night?"

"I like to have them by me, in case. I say, you didn't meet Polly—my new maid—in the passage, did you?"

"No—why?"

Grace chuckled. "Only because she's rather nervous. You do look weird in that get-up, you know, old girl."

"H'm: it's very comfy. You needn't scoff at my poverty"—"Fiddle" said Grace—"and draw invidious contrasts between the way you dress and the way I dress, because one of these days I'm going to have a mauve silk kimono trimmed with swansdown."

"Very sensible of you: swansdown washes so well."

"When it becomes soiled I shall throw it away—no, give it to my maid, I mean—and buy another."

"All right," said Grace cheerfully, "invite me to the wedding!"

"What wedding?"

"Why, your wedding, of course! What's the matter with the child?"

"Oh, nothing. I say, Charles Auburn does dance well. Don't you think he's really rather nice?"

"Well, if you ask me," Grace said with irrepressible energy, "I thought you both of you behaved abominably! Of course Mr. Auburn's a perfect spoiled child and thinks he can do as he likes: but I must say, Dodo, I thought *you* had more sense!"

Dodo sat down on the wide window-seat, leaning her fair head against the dark oaken frame. Pale and grave, she stretched out her left hand and waved it to and fro under Miss Trevor's nose. On the third finger sparkled a curious ring, consisting of a single square emerald sculptured with the words: FOY POUR DEVOIR.

"Hullo," said Grace, "what's all this? I rather think I've seen this before."

"I rather think you have."

"Do you mean to tell me you've gone and got engaged?" Dodo nodded. "*Engaged to Mr. Auburn?*"

"Yes'm. D'you mind?"

"This—this is news." Grace seized hold of a chair and sat down. "Dodo, are you—are you sure he was serious?"

"Yes, I *am*," said Dodo with asperity, "perfectly serious—and don't you think you're rather rude?"

"Dare say—can't help it. I never should have thought it of him. So that's why you two sneaked off into the garden, was it? I suppose we were absolute idiots not to see."

"There wasn't anything to see. I never was so startled in my life, Grace! I hadn't the faintest idea he was going to—to——"

"Didn't you know he liked you?"

"I didn't know I knew he liked me."

"Oh, you're too subtle for me. I say, Dodo: was it he who sent you that frock?" Dodo nodded. "There, I knew it! It came into my head this morning, but I thought it was a wild flight of imagination. How did he manage it?"

"He stole my photograph out of Roden's room and sent it to Pasquin's, with my height and general description. He was here, you know, the day Mabel Blandford came to tea, when she was what he calls so infernally patronizing, and it seems to have rankled ever since. I taxed him with it: he wouldn't own up at first, but he couldn't deny it—he's a truthful person—and I soon got it out of him. He declined to tell me what he paid for it, though."

"Well, well," said Grace, rubbing her nose, "it was very nice of him. But are you really going to marry him?"

"Rather!"

"What for?"

"Ten thousand a year, Grace Trevor, and you ask me what for?"

"Rot!" said Grace bluntly. "Do you really like him, Dodo?"

"You see it's so sudden. Till to-night I regarded him as a brother——"

"Oh!"

"Well, more or less—and then when I found he didn't regard me as a sister it was so exciting that I was unable to concentrate my thoughts at all. Gracie."

"Well?"

"Did any one ever kiss you?"

Grace shook her head.

"Then we can't compare notes," said Dodo, disappointed. "You've no idea how queer it is. Parts of it are—oh, thank goodness Roddy didn't hear me say that. It's on our black list."

Grace laughed: but she soon grew grave again.

"You'll have to make out a black list for Mr. Auburn now."

"So I shall: it'll begin with a D."

"You don't sound overjoyed. Don't you want to be married?"

"Oh yes," Dodo said, crossing one slender knee over the other and clasping her hands about them, "I want to be married, and go to Paris, and have kimonos and motors and bisques and béchamels and things. But I'm rather sorry about going away from home. I've always stayed here to look after the boys, and I can't bear to think what they'll do without me. Aline never gets up unless she's called, and they can't call her—it wouldn't be proper. And who'll cook the supper on her evening out?"

"Roddy?"

"He can't make anything except an omelette; and he can't even make an omelette without breaking more eggs than you can get into the frying-pan."

"Well, you can't jilt Mr. Auburn to stay and cook the supper. Besides, they'll get on all right—people always

do. I've known heaps of cases where the family prop got married——"

"Without detriment to the family property. I know: it's as the poet says—

‘Trust me, To-day’s Most Indispensables——’

I quoted that to Mabel Blandford once, and she looked rather grave: I think she thought it meant trousers. Dear me, I'm afraid that's vulgar: I hope I shan't catch the infection from Charles. Doesn't it sound droll to hear me calling him Charles? My Charles!" She stretched out her arms with a rapturous expression. "Or as thus: 'Charles darling!' Or again: 'My own, sweet Charlie!' What are you looking so pensive about? I thought you would be pleased. Are you cross because I'm not sentimental?"

"I don't know how sentimental you may be: I know you jolly well wouldn't tell me if you were," Grace retorted with more energy than elegance. "I'm not cross."

"What are you, then? Worrying over Roden having to cook the dinner?"

"No, donkey!"

"I think you might be more respectful to the future Lady Auburn."

"*That's* what I don't like," Grace said passionately, the color coming into her face in the heat of her spirit. "I don't like it: I can't bear it. You don't know what Sir Charles is like."

"My goodness!" said Dodo, turning round from the window to gaze at her friend, "what's the matter with you? Little pots are soon hot, Gracie."

Grace was plaiting her feelings into her pigtail, and did not reply. In a more serious tone Dodo resumed, after a short silence: "I think you ought to say more than that, after saying anything at all. You've been simmering for weeks—ever since he came down here: and so has Charles himself. Tell me—I shan't mind."

"It's only this, that I'd rather you weren't going to marry the son of a dissolute old sot like Sir Charles Auburn. It's hereditary."

"But Charles doesn't drink, or dissolve either."

"The sins of the fathers . . ."

"H'm. Unto the third generation, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"I'm not afraid. If we had a baby, and it took to drink—I mean——" Dodo rippled into laughter—"Well, but, seriously, if when he grew up he wanted to resemble his grandfather, we could fight it, couldn't we?"

"Doctors say——"

"Pooh! I don't care a fig about doctors. You can prove anything in your head. Roddy and I once for fun worked out a diet scheme of things that wouldn't give you microbes, and by the time we'd collated three or four standard authorities we had nothing left except sterilized warm water and toffee."

"Are you in love with him, Dodo?"

"Why?"

"Because, if you are, I won't say another word. There is a risk in marrying a man who comes of such a stock as Mr. Auburn does: but if you really love him it's a risk that's worth taking. But if you don't——"

"Why shouldn't I? He isn't bad-looking."

"He's very handsome, and a very good dancer, and his clothes are perfectly cut," said Grace, with a passing tinge of irony: "and I dare say he can be rather fascinating when he takes the trouble. But you won't be always dancing the two-step. You see, Dodo, you're very young—I think we all forget sometimes how young you are: you're so old in some ways. But you're not old in experience of men of Charles Auburn's type."

"What type do you mean?"

"Idle, irresponsible: changeable."

"Is that how you read him?" said Dodo.

She rose up, wound her arm round Gracie, and kissed her—to the great surprise of that young lady: for their friendship was not of the reputed feminine type. “Dear darling, I love you, anyhow. You’re the very best old Grace that ever did its hair in pigtails, and it’s a shame to keep you up so late and spoil your complexion, but I’m going to bed now, so you can, too. Good-night.”

She was out of the room before Grace had realized that she was going. Miss Trevor stood long by the open window: it was high dawn, and the birds were twittering in the elms near by before she went to bed. Her eyes were wistful.

VI.

IT is sad, but true, that when Auburn awoke on the morning after the dance, he wished Dodo and all her family in Jericho.

He would have liked to run away. Unfortunately, things had gone too far. "I must have been drunk!" he groaned. This theory, however, fell through; the most temperate of men, he had not touched wine except to finish, from purely sentimental motives, the remains of Dodo's glass of champagne. How dreary it looked, that sentiment, in the cold light of retrospect! He was pathetically candid with himself. "She won't jilt me," he said; "they never do when you want them to. And how the dickens am I to tell Roland? I swear she's not even pretty!" Auburn's meditations were entirely bare of chivalrous delicacy: he writhed like a man in chains. Possibly such a frame of mind is not so rare as one would like to believe, on that dismal To-morrow morning.

Towards twelve o'clock, while he was smoking in the studio over a novel, Dodo came home from the Trevors'. He heard her voice in the hall, but stayed where he was, feeling an immense disinclination to face her. Vain delay! The voice drew nearer, that rapid gay utterance so characteristic of Miss Carminow: she was giving directions in French to Aline about the evening meal. "Je vais chercher M. Roden," he heard her say: and the door opened and in she came—and paused. Apparently she was not prepared to find Monsieur Charles. "Oh, there you are!" she said with striking originality.

Auburn threw his book away. Ought he to kiss her?

Certainly not—he had (thank heaven) only that moment finished his cigar. But, short of a kiss, what was the orthodox greeting? “Yes, here I am,” he replied, “in fact, here we both are.”

A dim gleam came into Dodo’s eyes. “It’s a very fine morning,” she observed.

“Lovely,” assented Auburn. “I hope you’re not very tired.”

“Not at all, thank you,” said Dodo. “We had ham and eggs for breakfast.”

“Ham and——?”

“Eggs. It doesn’t matter what you say, so long as you say something.”

“Dodo——!”

She had fled: she was in the hall, where Aline was scrubbing the doorsteps. A trail of perfume from the mignonette tucked into her belt, the echo of a naughty laugh, these were all that remained of her. Auburn passed his hand across his forehead. “What an ass I was to have that cigar!” he said.

He followed her, and found her framed in dusty sunshine, which streamed across the raftered hall from the wide-open doorway. “Enfin, c’est fini, n’est-ce pas?” she was saying: “les petits pois pour ce soir, avec du beurre . . . beaucoup, beaucoup de beurre. . . .”

“Bien, ma’m’selle.”

“Dodo,” said Auburn, “I’m going in to see Mr. Carminow.”

“Bien, monsieur,” said Dodo.

As often happens in this life of ours, Auburn’s interview with Mr. Carminow was more amusing in retrospect than at the time. A very unworldly man, the Vicar knew little about Auburn’s financial condition: in fact, no thought of settlements crossed his mind till Auburn himself introduced the topic. It was some time before he could be got to believe that Auburn was in earnest, and when that fact did

dawn upon Mr. Carminow he did not go out of his way to flatter so eligible a son-in-law; on the contrary, though courteous as a Christian should be, he was openly regretful.

"To you personally I have no objection at all," he explained, "in fact the very reverse." (Auburn had told him candidly that he was an agnostic and the son of a scamp; but these things did not affect the Vicar's peculiar philosophy.) "There is no one I would rather adopt into my family, if I wanted to adopt any one into my family. But I do not, and that's the truth of it. Old men are often selfish, my dear Charles. You see, you're going to steal my one ewe lamb; and I can tell you frankly, if I had known what would have come of it, I'd have forbidden you the house."

"Can't you trust me to make her happy, sir?" asked Auburn.

"Oh yes; but the point is I want her to make me happy," explained the Vicar.

He put Auburn through a close catechism, and preached him a most disconcerting little sermon on the duties of the married state, Auburn keeping his temper with an effort: at once shy and proud, he hated to be questioned. In the end, Mr. Carminow gave an unwilling and provisional consent.

"Of course you won't think of marrying for the next year or two," he said. "Dodo is far too young at present; she is a mere child. You must wait till she is twenty-one at least, and that will give us all time to know more of you, my dear boy, and of your father too; for I don't at all like the idea of your not getting on with him. He may not be in all respects quite what he ought to be, but still you are his son, and you must forgive me if I am inclined to fancy there may be faults on both sides. I think a great deal of the family tie, Charles. I am unfashionable enough to believe in filial duty. I should not like one of my boys to speak of me as you speak of your father."

Lunch brought a change, but hardly for the better. Roden was grave, Caron sardonic, Bernard's face a study in cold dislike: Dickie alone was whole-hearted in congratulation—Dickie, the fool of the family!—and the prevalent feeling of constraint was not lessened by the fact that Dodo and her brothers were plainly at war. The meal over, Miss Carminow fled to her own room. Roden drifted into the garden, and there Auburn presently joined him.

"Why are you all so sick about this?" he asked without preface.

"Various reasons," answered Roden the laconic.

"Better speak frankly."

"She's too young for you, and you're too rich for her."

"You're an unworldly family, don't you think?"

"We have certain ideas."

"Anything more?"

"Sir Charles."

Auburn winced. "Damn Sir Charles! With luck, he'll die soon."

"I know it's no business of mine," Roden said, "but I wish you wouldn't swear at him. It does sound so very dreadful."

"Is that all?" Auburn asked, after a pause during which he decided not to lose his temper.

"Also you call yourself an agnostic, don't you?"

"Ah!" said Auburn.

He rolled over on his back, so that he could watch Roden's face. "You're not bigoted, Roden?"

"Oh, I don't blame you," said Roden, slowly and disconnectedly. "It's not your fault. Still, one would rather. . . . Religion counts for so much in some lives. The Babe was born religious. She . . . will . . . see God in everything. You, if any trouble comes, will . . . have a bad time, Auburn. You will be beating your head against a wall. That will be hard for you and hard for Dodo."

"You see God in everything yourself, don't you?" said Auburn in a conversational tone. His deep, unsatisfied eyes dragged an answer out of Roden.

"I suppose so."

"I wish you'd give me the receipt. Would prayer and fasting do it? . . . You really are certain of a future life?"

"Certain. Aren't you?"

"Quite—that there isn't any."

Auburn turned over again, his fingers plucking at the grass.

"You believe in it all—Christ, Son of God, born of a Virgin?"

"Quia impossibile?"

"What, miracles and all?"

Roden smiled. "By Jove!" said Auburn, "how do you do it?"

"That's what I should like to know," said Roden. "Candidly, Auburn, you are at least an equal mystery to me. How can you live in this world, believing that there's no other? Or, if you can face extinction for yourself—and it takes some facing—how can you face it for others—for Dodo, say, if you really are fond of her? What do you believe in—anything?"

"In my dinner."

"That's an exhaustive creed. Do you put marriage on the same footing?"

"I never thought about it."

"Never thought about it! You never do think about it, or anything else of the sort. You're as little introspective as any man I've ever known."

Auburn sat up, cross-legged and scowling: his lean brown face expressing a desperate effort in self-analysis.

"I gave up thinking about myself some twenty years ago: did it more or less deliberately: sheer, flat, violent indifference was the only thing that would carry me through.

Mind you, I've not had altogether plain sailing in my life." He waited a moment, tried to say to Roden part of what he had said to Dodo of the years under Sir Charles' hand, found that he could not do it, and went on: "So far as I can read myself, I've not a particle of faith in me. I don't hate the Christians—I've no grudge against them; on the contrary, it touches my imagination to see people praying. But it doesn't touch anything deeper than imagination. I needn't tell you that I shan't argue the point with Dodo. If she likes to believe in a reunion after death, let her! I could as soon believe in Balaam's ass or Jonah's whale, but I've no desire to proselytize. But I do believe in this life, and not from the sensual standpoint, either. You Christians are apt to think that we pagans are necessarily sensualists: I deny it. I've seen women ten times handsomer than your sister, but I didn't care a straw for them: I do for her. I dare say, if you threw your weight into the wrong scale, you could make Mr. Carminow refuse his consent. Don't do it, will you? We should win in the long-run, but I don't want to waste time."

"Eternity thundering at the doors?"

"Eh?"

"At my back I always hear,
Time's winged chariots hurrying near,"

quoted Roden, gravely. "I see your point."

"Just so: I'm thirty-five already. Half my time's gone, and—there is no extension of leave."

"What a pleasing notion!"

"Ah! I'm not introspective," said Auburn with a light laugh.

VII.

“**I** BEG your pardon, sir.”

Roden paused with the gate in his hand. He was on his way home from tennis at the Trevors', and the person who had accosted him at his own door was a slight, undersized man of thirty, with a thin, brown face, and the bearing of a gentleman's servant. “Yes?” said Roden, “what is it?”

“May I ask, sir, if you are one of the young Mr. Carminows?”

“I used to be.”

“I have a letter, sir, for my master, Mr. Auburn.”

“What then—do you want me to give it to him?”

“If you would be so good, sir. I've been up to the house, but the maid told me my master was out, and I hardly cared to leave it with her: it's an important letter.”

“But where do you come from?” Roden asked, becoming sensible of the strangeness of a man thus springing up from nowhere with a letter in his hand, “not by train, surely?”

“I am at an inn at Countisford, sir, where Mr. Auburn told me to wait for him. I am his body-servant: he generally takes me about with him. I have been sending on the rest of his correspondence, but I did not care to trust this into the post a second time. I know he'll like to have it as soon as may be.”

“Why not wait at the house till he comes in, then? He's sure to be home to tea.”

The man shook his head. “I must get back to Countisford, sir. Mr. Charles might be riding over, and I shouldn't

like to have him do that and me not there. But I feel sure, sir, if you will excuse me, that the letter'll be safe with you."

Somewhat amused, Roden accepted his commission, and the letter was extracted from a leathern pocket-book and duly handed over: a large, square, white envelope, addressed in a large, square, imperfectly educated hand. This done, the faithful servant got on his bicycle, touched his cap to Roden, and rode away.

"Hullo, Dickie! Is Auburn in yet?"

"He's gone up the hill with Dodo and Caron."

"Par-r-bleu! I wish he weren't so beastly energetic. Rather mean of Caron to go too!"

Dickie grinned. "Dodo made him: said she didn't want to spoon."

"Queer little animal, our Dodo!" was Roden's philosophic comment, as he set his weary legs to climb the steep footpath through the orchard. A couple of hundred feet above the Vicarage chimneys, he came out upon a wild hilly region, where the long grass under the fruit trees gave place to moorland turf, sparse and flower-set. He had to go still higher before he came upon those he wanted: Dodo sitting on a shelf of turf, Auburn as usual supine at her feet, Caron cross-legged under a bush and sketching the pair of them. There was a good deal of wind blowing: the opposite hills were nearly of the same color as the clouds, and they were slaty blue: the village lay below, winding with the winding valley, picked out in the silver of sunlit windows, and threaded here and there with smoke: the sky too was silver-pale where it was clear, but the large vague clouds near the sun were rimmed with burning wire. Sunshine and shadow never prevailed over the whole landscape at once, but kept flying after each other, as if chariots of iron and chariots of gold were being driven by the wind over the tops of the hills alternately.

At a glance Roden perceived that the spiritual atmosphere was full as sunny as the natural. Caron was happily absorbed in his art. Dodo's brow was placid. Auburn's smile was that of a man who is in charity with all mankind. Roden looked over the artist's shoulder, and uttered a startled exclamation.

"What's up?" asked Auburn lazily.

"You've spoiled it now," Caron said, "but I don't mind. I don't want to retouch it. Why should a man bother about the bare body? The soul's always bare, when you've eyes to see it. When I do things like that I forget that I'm a hunchback." He stretched his arms above his head and laughed softly. Roden silently held up the sketch. The shadows of a bare room, an iron-barred window, and a man lying on the bare floor: Auburn in every lineament, but Auburn struggling in hard endurance to keep down the rising wildness of terror.

"Good!" said Auburn placidly.

"Give me," said Dodo.

She took the block from Roden, and in a trice the fragments of Caron's sketch were showering down the wind. Caron only laughed. It was done, and he cared no more for it. Dodo was methodical and unrepentant.

"I say, Auburn," said Roden, "do you mind getting up for a moment?"

"Intensely. Why?"

"Because I can't kick a man when he's down, can I?"

"Eh? What's up?"

"You've been tampering with Dodo's affections, and basely betraying my young sister's confidence. What do you mean by carrying on a clandestine correspondence under our very noses, and using your miserable flunkey as a go-between?"

"What about my flunkey?" asked Auburn, sitting up.

Roden handed him the letter with the tips of his finger and thumb. "Hardened reprobate!" he said, as Auburn

after a glance at the handwriting tore it open with a startled expression. "He doesn't even blush. If you've any proper pride, Dodo——"

"I hope it isn't bad news, Charles?" said Dodo. "Do sit down and be quiet, Roddy, you're like a gnat buzzing."

"Here's a go!" said Auburn, laying down his letter with a perpleved expression. "I thought it was too sunny to last. This is rather awkward, Dodo."

"Italian wife?" inquired Roden cheerfully.

"*Don't* buzz, Roddy. What is it, old boy?"

"It's the venerated parent on the war-path. I'll read it aloud if you like: our family affairs are generally transacted in public."

In a very sober voice, Auburn proceeded to do as he had said.

"ROSE COTTAGE, AUBURN,

"July 1st.

"SIR,—The Devil is come Abroad, having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short Time. He hath broken 6 Wineglasses and 2 Decanters through Davis being frightened of his bad words and falling downstairs with the Tray. He is going up shortly to find You, and Davis tells me he is like a Madman when he talks about You. Piers writes You are staying with Friends. I am writing same time to Piers as I do not know Your Address to bid him carry this to You direct. For dear Sir I fear he will not have any scruple to thrust himself upon Them and make a To do as You will remember at Mr. Carew's.

"Piers writes You are thinking of getting married. Now my lamb if this is true there is a thing You ought to know. Do not entangle Yourself with the Young Lady till You have seen and spoken with me. I have no skill to write, but I would fain see Your face again, Who are in some sort my Son, and I will speak what I cannot write.

"Sir Charles hath been having gout in his Toe lately, but I fear it is better and will not come on again.

"As You so kindly ask after Jeannie, She is no better, but sends Her duty, as I do also.

"Your most obedient humble Servant,

"LESBIA BURNET."

Biting her lip to repress a smile, Dodo took the letter from Auburn, and smoothed it out on her knee. "Who writes?" she asked.

"My foster-mother and nurse: she lives with her sister in a cottage just outside our gates."

"Is she mad?" asked Caron. Auburn laughed.

"None less so. I have complete faith in Lesbia's judgment—worse luck."

"You don't mean to say you'll go?" Dodo asked.

"I shall indeed, if it were only to prevent him from coming up here. You have no room for Sir Charles."

"We could easily put him up——" Dodo began, taking these words literally, but Auburn laughed in her face. "Thanks," he said dryly, "but you don't 'remember Mr. Carew's.' I do. Once is enough."

"Let's see, when did you write to him?" asked Roden.

"The day before yesterday. I wonder what it is that's riled him? He's been at me to marry any time these ten years. There's no pleasing some people."

"What does she mean by 'getting entangled'? She's rather rude, I think," said Dodo, referring to the letter. "And what do you suppose her secret is?"

"Can't say: it's the first I've heard of it."

"What's she like?"

"Fifty-five: a widow since she was thirty. She was my mother's maid before my mother married Sir Charles, and she married my grandfather's soldier servant. They had one child, a boy, born the same day that I was: it only lived a week. She'll never get over that, but I don't think she regrets the late Alexander. I've heard her describe him as 'a poor lash thing, like a jenneting in a wet

summer.' After my mother's death she settled down in a house close to our gates with her half-sister, Jeannie, a girl of half her age, very pretty but very delicate. Lesbia mothers her sternly. Lesbia's uncommonly handsome, if that's anything to the point: tall, with iron-grey hair and dark-blue eyes and a splendid pair of shoulders. Has a will of her own, too, and a temper."

"Formidable! Why does she write in that queer way?"

"She writes as she talks, a dialect of her own coinage. The foundation is scriptural: the late Alexander contributed a dash of Scots, and association with my mother added a dash of bookish, cultivated English. But Lesbia's not educated—she can only read and write. Jeannie talks like a book. My mother's family made a pet of her and sent her to school, and the result is that when Lesbia talks Calvin Jeannie talks Browning. They're an odd pair."

"They are, I should think. And shall you really go down there?"

"In the car," Auburn. "I shall be there and back in twelve hours."

"Well, don't be long," said Dodo nonchalantly. "I shall be so bored."

Auburn sat up, threw his arm around her, and kissed her. It was done so rapidly that Dodo had no chance to protest, but could only gaze at him with all her astonished soul in her eyes. Caron screwed up his face as though he were taking medicine, and Roden said, "Well, upon my word! Pray don't let us embarrass you!"

"My dear souls, you don't," Auburn responded cheerfully. He rose up, very tall and erect, from his couch of turf. "Farewell, Dorothea! I'm off."

"Why, you're not going now?"

"I never take risks with Sir Charles."

He ran down the hillside, springing from tussock to tussock, from ledge to ledge. At the top of the orchard he

turned, waved his hand, then vanished under the arcade of the trees.

“Suppose he never comes back?” said Roden involuntarily.

“Then Dodo will regret having torn up an essentially lifelike imaginary portrait.”

“Clever boys!” said Dodo indolently, “how well you know him!”

VIII.

LATE on a warm grey evening, Lesbia Burnet stood with her arms folded along the top of her garden gate, looking down the road, which was already turning dark under the shade of July woods. Rose Cottage was a small, square house, standing in a plot of garden where flowers and vegetables thrive together: it lay close to the park gates of Auburn, and was regarded as a Naboth's vineyard by the present baronet. Lesbia, however, slept none the worse for that. Her father and her father's father had lived in it before her, and it was her own: she loved the red roof, the latticed windows, the giant willow that towered up behind it, and the dense woods that shut it in. Artists came and sketched it—for it was a picturesque old place—at their peril, for Lesbia liked privacy and was strong in the arm. Rich content swelled in her bosom when she looked round her small domain.

A warm, grey evening: the great, vague clouds tinged with a bluish shade, which looked, thought the weatherwise Lesbia, like thunder. The wind had dropped. The great elms hung down their leaves without stir or sigh. Nothing was to be seen but an empty curve of road, perhaps a quarter of a mile long, bordered on either side by the tall deer-fence enclosing the dark masses of the Auburn woods. Turning away disappointed, Lesbia walked up the short path between the red summer primroses and the laden gooseberry bushes, and went into the house. First into the hot kitchen, to shift a saucepan and take a look at the oven: then along a flagged passage into the front parlor, arranged, in defiance of etiquette, as the living-room of an invalid.

There was a large folding window, thrown wide to let in the airless air: there were curtains of pale flowered chintz, tapestried armchairs, books, old-fashioned china, and a handful of honeysuckle thrust into a specimen glass. Near the window, on a sofa heaped with cushions, lay the ailing girl for whom all these pretty things had been gathered together: Lesbia's young sister Jeannie. There had been others, but they were dead, carried off by premature sickness—the same whose ravages were traceable in Jeannie's haggard face and hectic color. Only Lesbia herself, in her magnificent strength, had escaped the dread taint. As she came in, Jeannie laid down her book. "Mr. Charles won't come to-night," she said in a low, somewhat husky voice.

"I'll sugar your porridge if you say that again!" Lesbia cried out resentfully. "You idle thing, you might as well prophesy smooth things as the other sort—it's not much you know about it, that I can see."

"He'll stay up in the Plain and make love to his pretty lady——"

"He's not such a fool, then!"

"And put your letter in the fire," finished Jeannie, laughing in Lesbia's angry face. "What's it to him? He's far far too handsome to be true."

"I'll take your books away if you talk to me like that," Lesbia grumbled out as she went to light the lamp; "or serve you as I did the chap that came this afternoon while you were lying down. Did you hear us? I wonder at that, for he made noise enough. Sat himself down in the road, he did, with his knickerbockers and his camp-stool—you'll never persuade me that the Lord meant all these artist folk to wear knickerbockers: if He did, He'd have given them calves to their legs—and brought out his sketch-book and began to paint the house! Out I came with a bucket of water to tip over the roses, and there was my gentleman cap in hand and as cool as impudence!"

"What did you say to him?"

"D'you think I was going to speak to muck like that? 'Twas he began it. 'My good woman,' says he, and with that I stopped him. 'I'm no woman of yours, unless you're dead and buried in Woking Cemetery, which is too good news to be true.' "

"You had him there!"

"Not he! Some folks are such fools you can't have them, and he was that sort: he thought 'twas I was the fool. 'Madam,' says he, 'it's only a way of speaking—I meant no harm.' You're to observe that I could easily have taken him across my knee and spanked him, but I didn't, and he went on. 'In plain English,' says he, 'I'll give you half a crown to stand in the porch while I work you into my sketch.' 'Let me look at the sketch,' says I. It was without form and void, like his breeches. 'It's worse than your manners, my good man,' says I, and with that I hit the bucket of water over it, and came away."

"Well, you had him there, anyhow," said Jeannie dryly. "But you'd better mind what you're about, Lesbia, or you'll have people calling you eccentric." She turned restlessly, and stretched out her hands towards the window. "It's a hot night, isn't it?"

"Glooming up for a thunderstorm, I think. Does your head ache?"

"A little: there's such a hot, dead feeling in the air under all these trees. I heard the wind going in the tops of them, though, before you came in."

"The thunder will come with the wind, and the rain after the thunder: it will do a lot of good," said Lesbia. Again she walked to the window and glanced up and down the road. "To think I'm going to see my boy again to-night! I'd rather have my tongue torn out than say what I've got to say to him: but it will be good to see his handsome face again, for all that."

"Much obliged for the compliment!"

Entering the porch just as Lesbia went to the window,

Auburn had walked in without ceremony, and now appeared in the doorway, his head barely clear of the lintel, his hands in his pockets and a merry smile on his lips. Jeannie opened her mouth to a silent "O!" of surprise, pleasure, and some less obvious emotion. The room seemed suddenly to have grown smaller.

"For shame, Mr. Charles!" said Lesbia, coloring deeply from vexation. "Is it of you that I'm to learn to lock my doors against eavesdroppers?" Making him a slight curtsey, she drew forward a chair. "Will you please to sit down, sir? You've walked, I suppose, from the village."

Auburn shut the door and leaned his back against it. "Mr. Charles won't sit down till he's addressed in a proper way. *Allons*, Lesbia! I've had neither tea nor dinner, but if you won't be civil I'll go to the station and kill myself on Bath buns!"

"That you'll not, then, when I've taken the pains to get supper ready for you," retorted Lesbia, half laughing: and lifting the lamp out of the way, she began to set the table with her powerful, capable hands, so rapid and exact in every movement—the sort of hands that would not be stronger to wield a hammer than delicate in nursing a wren's egg. "There's a hash of venison that would go bad before Jeannie and I got through it, and such a dish of peas as they wouldn't give you at your club, and some ungodly bottled beer that I'll not keep in the cellar a day longer for fear the roof should fall on us—Bass is the man that made it—him that's so chief with the Man of Wrath. Well, and how's your young lady?"

Auburn was used to Mrs. Burnet's inquisitorial methods, and remained unblushing. "Very fit, thanks: she sent her love to you."

"My lamb, you've never let it go on to that?"

"I grieve to say your letter arrived a day behind the fair. I was already entangled."

Lesbia set her silver straight without a word: her face

was very dark for a moment, but resolutely she cleared it. "I wonder," she said, more to herself than to Auburn, "how an unbeliever gets through this world. I'd go mad if I thought the tangles were in my hands to clear.—Jeannie my girl, here comes the storm: finish you the table while I see to the dishing up."

She went out, leaving Auburn alone with Jeannie, who rose and went on with her preparations. Auburn threw himself into a chair to watch her. She had Lesbia's dexterity though not her strength, and it was pretty to see her, with her long, lean, shadowy fingers, plaiting up a damask napkin into a little white ship.

"Who's that for?" asked Auburn idly.

"Me, I think: to sail away in, some day."

"I wouldn't sail away if I were you: I'd stay in port."

"Would you?" said Jeannie, smiling:

'Fainter and fainter wreck and helmsman loom,
Still standing for some false, impossible shore. . .'

It was a great man that wrote that, Mr. Auburn: a man who knew what it's like to be wrecked."

"He was an inspector of schools," said Auburn. "I'm sorry, but he was."

"I know: I've read his life. If you come to think of it, the greatest experiences are those that are common to all men, even inspectors of schools—birth, death, bereavement."

Thunder pealing, lightning flashing right overhead made a strange accompaniment to her words. The wind had come with the thunder, but the rain was not yet come: the trees were bending and straining and rattling their dry leaves, the lower branches whitened by the whirling dust, the upper dark against the incessant glare in the sky. In came Lesbia, carrying a great platter of venison, smoking hot, in one hand, and a noble dish of peas in the other: they drew up their chairs to the table and fell to, after a short grace, pronounced and probably composed by Mrs. Burnet. "Lord,"

said she, "grant that we may eat with thankfulness and without gluttony these Thy creatures of meat and fruit; and that Thy creatures of the fields, the trees and the crops and the animals, and Thy tall churches, and ships at sea, may be preserved from the will of Thy servant the Devil in his storm." To this Jeannie having replied "Amen," the venison and the peas were discussed with a good relish. The beer was for Auburn's use alone: his hostess (whose creed would have taxed the brains of a theological college) and Jeannie confining themselves to water.

"And now," said Lesbia when the meal was over and the table cleared, "Jeannie, go to bed."

Jeannie rose obediently. "You'll not be very long?" she asked.

"Not long."

"Good-night, Mr. Auburn."

"Good-night, dear," said Auburn absently. As he took her hand, she looked up into his face with her deep, burning eyes. "Oh," she said, "how like you are to your father, sometimes!"

She drew back. Auburn, who had had some idea of kissing her, looked inquiringly at Lesbia, who shook her head.

"Let her go: she's tired to-night, and the thunder makes her fanciful. Run, child, and slip between the sheets: here's rain to cool the air and make you sleep. Come, be off!"

Jeannie went out slowly, with the lagging footsteps of fatigue. Left alone with Auburn, Lesbia still found a thing or two to do: she wound the clock, wiped up a few drops of water spilled on the cloth, and lifted in a couple of plants that had stood all day on the window-sill. Auburn watched her proceedings in silent amusement. At length she blew the lamp out, and sat down on Jeannie's couch under the open window. The storm was over now, and the wind had gone by: the air came in slowly, blessedly cool, smelling of wet grass and leaves. They heard the ceaseless rushing of

the rain, the steady drip, drip, patter, patter, of water falling through a crack in the gutter under the eaves. It was close on ten o'clock, but the night was not dark: there was a small moon behind the clouds, which diffused a universal grey illumination, scarcely amounting to light, casting no shadows, yet different as daylight itself from the dark of a moonless night. Drip, drip, patter, patter, patter. "Lesbia," said Auburn, "let's get it over."

"I know you're not one of those that like to be kept waiting. But you must bear with me, Charles; I'm not so young as I was. Tell me, without any joking, is it true you're going to be married to this young lady?"

"Yes, I am."

"Does she know what manner of man your father was?"

"She knows a good deal. Who doesn't?"

"You've told her yourself?"

"Yes, before we became engaged."

"Charles, there's much that even you don't know."

"Oh, come!" said Auburn with a sudden laugh, "I can't believe that! There's little room for expansion. He lies like a hatter, he swears like a trooper, and he drinks like a fish—what more do you want? 'Portrait of a Father, by his Son: guaranteed genuine—a labor of love.'"

"Did you ever hear anything about your mother, Charles?"

"My mother? Little enough: she died soon after I was born, didn't she?"

"Aye: she never rose from her bed."

"But why? you're not going to tell me she shared any of his little weaknesses?"

"Your mother was a sweet lady: good and kind, gentle and true. She was nineteen when they married her up to Sir Charles: I was her maid, and my man Alexander, he got the post of valet to Sir Charles. You and my boy were born the same day, and when my boy died I took you from her breast, and you were to me as my own son. She'd only

been married a year: such a year! Many's the time when he was drunk, yes and sober too, I've seen him strike her, and that before the servants. And he'd bring women to the house, and make her sit down to dinner with them."

"Lesbia, why are you telling me this? I'm not so fond of him already."

"I tell you you don't know a thing about it," said Lesbia slowly. "What I've got to tell you is something quite different. . . . He killed her."

"Good God!" said Auburn.

He rose and went to the window. The room, Lesbia's voice, his own body, all seemed to have grown unreal. He felt the cool air breathing on his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. He thought he was going to faint, and taking up the vase of honeysuckle he wetted his handkerchief and put it to his face. In a minute or so the horrible feeling passed off, and he was able to face Lesbia with some degree of composure.

"What do you mean? Explain, please."

"It was like this," said Lesbia. "You were seven weeks old. My lady had been very ill, but she was better, and the doctor said she'd pull round if we could only keep her quiet. He forbade Sir Charles to see her. 'On guard,' he said to me. 'Let nobody pass. I've told Sir Charles to keep away,' he said, 'unless he wants to be the death of her. Agitation would be fatal.' That was all he said, but we understood each other. He had wonderful sense for a man, that doctor.

"It was the night of the tenth of September, and very warm for the time of year. My lady lay in bed, dozing, and I sat by with you in my arms. My man was sleeping near at hand, and I'd had him put up a bell that rang in his room. He hadn't much of a head, but he'd been in the Grenadier Guards.

"By and by up comes Eliza to say Sir Charles wanted me in the library. My lady was frightened he'd come up

and make a row, so to pacify her I said I'd go. I put you down in your cot and locked the door behind me. I went to the library: it was empty. 'He's in the garden,' says Eliza. 'I'll fetch him.' So I waited, thinking no harm—why should I? But when the time went by, and she didn't come back, I began to be uneasy, and at last I gave him up and went up the stairs again. Half-way up I heard a babe crying. Then I began to run. As I came to the door I heard a loud, heavy noise like something falling over in the room, and then my lady's voice crying out 'Oh dear!' and then, 'Oh, Lesbia, do come!' "

She stopped short, clenching her hands together. "Go on," said Auburn.

"The lock stuck, and I couldn't turn the key. I cried out, 'I'm here, I'm coming,' but there was no answer, only some more noises. Before I got the door open it was all silent; only you were crying in your cot. My lady was lying on the floor in her nightgown. There was an inkpot on the table with a pen sticking in it, and the window was wide open. Then I remembered we'd had it open a crack at the top all the evening, because of the heat; and there was a balcony outside."

"And——?"

"Alexander came in, and I sent him riding for the doctor. But she went off delirious and died that night."

Lesbia rubbed her handkerchief over her eyes. The recital had wrung a kind of tears from her; few they were, and bitter.

"My lady was very rich, and a good bit of her money was in her own hands. When her affairs were gone into, Sir Charles produced a will leaving every penny of it to himself without conditions. The name was written very irregular and feeble, but it was her own hand. Eliza and one of the footmen witnessed it; and they swore they'd seen her sign it. A worthless lot the servants were, never the same two months running. Sir Charles was a young man then,

and his hand didn't shake, and his eye was true; he'd think nothing of pelting the decanter at a footman's head: and as for the maids, no girl that valued her character would stay in that house. Eliza and Tom got married soon after—none too soon for her—and went off to Canada, I suppose it was out of their savings.

“What I've told you to-day, I've never told before but once, and that was to the lawyer, Mr. Maine. He told me to hold my tongue, for he said you couldn't hang a fly on such evidence, and I might get myself into trouble.

“I've held my tongue for five-and-thirty years, and I hoped I might hold it for ever. But when I heard you were for marrying, I knew I'd got to speak. I'm sorry, dear.”

The rain was still falling, but more softly: showering down over the parched ground, the brown turf, the tanned haycock in the mead.

“Don't mind for me, Lesbia.”

“Not mind for you, my dear one? I'll be in my coffin when that day comes.”

“You're my real mother. I'm grateful to you for telling me this story, although it's rather a blow.” He could not go on for a moment. “I'm glad you told me, all the same. You're pretty brave, old Lesbia; you know how to face the music. . . . Look here, I can't stay indoors; I must get out into the open.”

Lesbia made no demur, although it was still pouring with rain. “Don't get through the window,” she said, “you'll break the geraniums. I'll let you out at the door.” She took him into the passage, turned the key, shot bolts, and lowered bars. “One would think you were afraid of thieves!” said Auburn.

“There's precious little in this house for any man to steal now,” Lesbia answered. “Aren't you going to take your hat? I'd lend you an umbrella if I thought you'd put it up.”

“I shouldn’t—thanks all the same. Good-night, dear.”

“Good-night, and God bless you, my darling.”

She shut the door on him and locked and bolted it again.

IX.

BARE-HEADED and without an overcoat, Auburn swung off down the road, while the rain continued to fall thickly and softly over the leafy woods. It was dark under their branches, but he knew every step of the way: he had roamed it many a time in his boyhood on wilder, gloomier nights than this, preferring the scourge of the hail or the deep drifted snow to the inhospitable luxury of Auburn. He might have slept in the heather, for all Sir Charles would have cared.

In the great grey Georgian house there had always been fires on the hearth, wines in the cellar, and horses in the stall, while bills were paid without demur, and pocket-money was to be had for the asking; but that was all. Perhaps Sir Charles did not dislike his son; perhaps there were times when he was inclined to be proud of the boy's physique and looks. If it was so, Auburn did not know it. Like the rest of the world, he found in Sir Charles only a man of violent temper and of coarse and cruel disposition.

Fortunately for himself, Auburn in his fourteenth year took to his bosom a friend in the person of Roland Carew, aged fifteen, only son of Mr. Peter Carew, of Ferndean, whose lands marched with the Auburn property. In common with the rest of the county, Mr. Carew held that the life at Auburn was a scandal; and, finding that an intimacy had sprung up between his son and young Auburn, he encouraged it, and gave the handsome wild boy the run of the house. His neighbors shook their heads, prophesying that he would regret it, but Mr. Carew placed considerable faith in Roland, and was also rather taken with the manners

and looks of Rolands new ally. "Roland is fourteen," he said, "old enough to take his own part. He'll go to Eton in the summer, and there he'll have to choose his friends. The lad is a plucky lad, and a gentleman at all events. I don't thing he'll teach Roland to drink or to swear, but if he tries it on I can trust my boy to settle with him. Anyhow I'll take no step to come between them till I see signs of mischief going on."

At this time Roland had a private tutor, and when Mr. Carew had satisfied himself that his confidence would not be abused he told Auburn that he might, if he liked, share Roland's lessons. Sir Charles was not consulted on the point, which Mr. Carew felt to be sailing rather near the wind: but then the circumstances were exceptional! Auburn at thirteen scarcely knew his A B C. He jumped at the opportunity, and worked double tides, till he was nearly on a level with his companion. Then came Eton for Roland, and a relapse into his former wild and solitary life for young Auburn: and Mr. Carew expected them to drift apart. They did not. During the next vacation they were inseparable, and before Roland returned to school matters came to a crisis.

Sir Charles came on the boys together in Auburn's room one evening. He had been drinking, and was full of an imaginary grievance against Auburn, who had been riding one of his father's horses—an act in itself no crime, but Sir Charles was in one of his brutal tempers, and merely required a pretext. Roland was witness of a scene such as had many times before been enacted at Auburn, but never in his presence. Disgusted, he listened to the copious torrent of profane eloquence that flowed from Sir Charles' lips: but disgust passed into wrath, and wrath into dismay, and dismay into a burning passion of pity and indignation, when Sir Charles went from words to action. At length Roland could bear it no longer and ran in between them, telling Sir Charles he was an old brute, and vaguely threat-

ening to send for the police. Possibly Sir Charles did not know the lads apart; at all events he made no attempt to discriminate between them, but with complete impartiality knocked Roland down and walked out. Roland jumped up, ran to Auburn, and hugged him. But Auburn turned away, leaned his arm along the mantelpiece, and laid his head down on it for a minute or two, sobbing. "Oh don't, old man!" said Roland, greatly distressed. "Did he hurt you? Don't, I can't stand you crying!"

Auburn lifted his head, and Roland saw that he had not been crying, and saw also that no bodily pain could have called that tragic, unboyish misery into Auburn's eyes. "You cut it, Roland," he said gently, "and you shan't come up here again. This place isn't fit for nice boys with people like yours."

Roland went home obediently, sought his father, and related the affair without exaggeration. Next day Mr. Carew had an interview with Sir Charles, and placed before him certain strong representations. Sir Charles was in a softened mood, and in some dim way ashamed of himself: the upshot of it all was that Auburn returned with Roland to Eton, and thenceforward spent most of his holidays at Ferndean.

Of all these things, and many others, Auburn was thinking, as he went on under the trees dripping with rain, over-spanned by a heaven of soft glooms and vague cloudy masses with a bloom of moonlight on them. Early sufferings print an imperishable mark upon a man's character. He could speak of Sir Charles lightly, but he could not think of him in that way, and for this reason he rarely allowed himself to think of him. A deep, settled, vindictive, sickening anger lay embedded in the very depths of his nature. Lesbia's story had quickened that anger, and, till it was mastered, he was not master of his own thoughts: they spun through his head like a drift of dead leaves.

He turned the bend of the road, where the woods on the

right fell back, and the tall deer-fence gave place to a low railing, beyond which fields dotted with clumps of trees went rolling away, far as the eye could see in that dim light, in broad and colorless undulations to the woody bound of the hills. The rain had ceased falling, but the air was blurred with mist: through the thinning clouds a faint glow revealed the situation of the moon, leaning down over the hills. There was neither light nor color anywhere, but only variations of the universal neutral tint of green things growing in the dark. He passed through an outlying hamlet; lamps gleamed here and there in the upper windows, and a dog barked angrily at the sound of steps along that lonely road. After that he came to a cross-roads, where a white lane wound away towards the river and the old mill. The night, the cloudy sky, the homely English landscape spoke to him with a thousand voices. The sleepers in those cottages were his father's laborers: he knew them all, and they knew him—he could tell the names of the children by their likeness to their parents. There was little change in the Vale. The same families lived in the same cottages year in year out, intermarrying and reproducing the same tow-headed, blue-eyed Saxon type. Sir Charles Auburn of Auburn was a great man to them, and "young Charl'" a person worth staring after. Yes, this was home! Then he began to think of Dodo, and to try to imagine himself married to her, and living with her in the great grey Georgian house. Passion was dead in that hour, but in its place came a strange warmth of friendship. "I should like to tell her all about it," he thought. He found himself longing for her presence, for her eyes and the touch of her hands. "But I never can bring her here," he thought, "to that house where. . . ." Hatred began to stir in him again, like some old pain that has been drugged for a time. "I can't bring her anywhere. I can't marry her. I am his son. My physical self is made out of his body. Oh, brute and devil! am I bound to you for ever? If I knew what

part of me came from you I'd cut it out fast enough, right foot or right eye!"

Wandering on at random, it was with surprise that he found himself, towards midnight, under the ivied walls of Ferndean and not a mile from Rose Cottage. He had been walking in a circle. Presently he came to the lodge gates, and turned in: a long avenue wound away through the park, but he took a familiar short cut, vaulted a fence, and crossed the lawn. Apparently the Carews had been giving a dinner-party, for lights were still burning in the drawing-room, and the windows were open. Auburn stood on the gravel, looking in. It was a pleasant room, spacious and grave: one wall was lined with books, another with tall cabinets full of Sèvres china and such-like precious trifles. The skin of a black panther sprawled along the polished floor. Near the windows, on an inlaid table, stood a huge Chinese bowl full of all colors of roses. The master of the house was standing in front of the hearth with his hands in his pockets: a tall, well-built man, with dark hair, dark eyes, and dark regular features. The trim severity of black and white became him very well: he looked handsome—perhaps rather handsome than interesting, rather well-bred than warm-hearted. Violet Carew, clad in a French-looking gown of black chiffon, stood under the chandelier absorbed in a newspaper, which she held up before her in both hands. She was neither pretty nor plain, and by people who did not know her well she was considered very sweet-looking. Presently she put down the newspaper, strolled up to Roland, and picked a white thread off his sleeve. "Well," said the master of the house, using the phrase consecrated from time immemorial to such occasions, "thank goodness, that's over!"

"Yes," assented the hospitable hostess, "but I thought they were never going. I'm so sleepy." She yawned unaffectedly. "I shall go to bed. Aren't you coming?"

"Directly. I want half a pipe first."

"Oh. Well, good-night in case I'm asleep."

"Good-night, darling."

He kissed her. Five years of married life had not, apparently, taken the savour from that process. Violet moved away, but paused at the door. "It went off all right, don't you think?"

"Oh, very. They're all nice people."

"Thomson waits very well now."

"Rather slow with the wines."

"H'm," said Violet, stifling another yawn. "Do you think the asparagus was done enough?"

"Didn't have any."

"Rupert Maxwell told me he met Sir Charles Auburn at the station yesterday morning, going up to town."

"Did he? I wish the train would run off the metals."

"I do too, rather. Shall you be long?"

"No I'm coming directly. You run along—you're looking fagged."

Violet went out. As soon as the door was closed, Auburn walked in. Roland was standing before the looking-glass inspecting his tie: he caught sight of Auburn, wheeled round, and stood rooted to the ground in astonishment.

"*Auburn! You?*"

"No, my ghost."

"Where—on earth—do you spring from?"

"I've been calling on Lesbia, and I thought I'd come on here."

"Are you aware that it's past midnight?"

"Oh? I thought it was ten minutes to one."

"But, good heavens! do you know that you're dripping wet?"

Auburn made a slight grimace. "The dickens I am! I forgot that. I think I'd better not come in."

"Come and sit down. Have you had anything to eat?"

"Take your hand off that bell-rope, unless you want me to depart incontinent. I don't desire a fuss, Roland."

Roland took him by the shoulders and pushed him down on a sofa, himself sitting on the arm of it. The tie between the two men was so old and deep and strong that sympathy took the place of penetration, with which Mr. Carew was poorly endowed. "All right, I won't make any fuss, old boy," he said. "Only I think you might tell me what's wrong. Have you had a row with Sir Ch—— Auburn! Look here, you shut up: that sort of thing's not good taste. After all he's your father."

"That is what is wrong," said Auburn. "I'm sorry, but I shall infallibly swear if I talk about him. Very wet to-night, isn't it?"

"Has anything happened?"

"I haven't murdered him, if that's what you mean. I'm not sure that I shan't, though. Why do you harp on that subject? I said it was a wet evening."

"Is it anything fresh?"

"Oh, let me alone, do, for heaven's sake! What an old woman you are to be so inquisitive!"

"Auburn, if you could see your own face *you* would be inquisitive."

"Should I? . . . Well, I'll tell you, then. Lesbia says he killed my mother." Roland said nothing. "I don't say he actually went for her with a bludgeon, but he was directly responsible for her death."

Half a dozen questions put Roland in possession of the facts. Auburn gave them languidly, looking white and tired: apparently he had exhausted himself in that one short and sharp outbreak which had called down on him Roland's rebuke. "A very indecent affair, isn't it?" finished Auburn.

"How utterly awful!" said Roland Carew slowly.

"You always put things so nicely," said Auburn, yawning. "Yes, I suppose it *is* utterly awful. It's not a hanging matter. To go to your wife's room and drag her out of bed is not murder. No one can touch Sir Charles."

"My dear fellow, you surely are not regretting it? You don't want a scandal."

"No, I'm his son, ain't I?"

Roland abandoned that side of the question; it did not bear looking at. "Lesbia ought never to have told you," he said. "She ought to have had the strength of mind to keep it to herself. Just like a woman—they're so fond of doing things by halves."

"She thought I ought to know."

"I don't see why now more than at any other time."

"No, possibly you don't," said Auburn, with a gleam of genuine merriment lighting up his eyes. "Let's see, when did I write to you last—from Salonica, wasn't it? Ah, that's ages ago. Have patience with me, and I will tell thee all." He got up and strolled over to smell the roses. "I'd have sent you a card for the ceremony, old man, on my honor I would!"

"What ceremony?"

"You wouldn't have been any good, you know, having already preceded me into the fatal noose. Still I should have been glad of your moral support——"

"Auburn, I do beg of you to be sensible! This is not a laughing matter."

"The fact that my father murdered my mother is certainly not a fit subject for mirth. The fact that I myself, am, or was, about to get married is—not a fit subject for raving up and down the room, dear boy! Calm yourself, do—you see I'm quite calm!"

Roland was not raving up and down the room, but neither was he calm. He came and put his hands on Auburn's shoulders: he went so far as to shake him slightly, half in exasperation, half as if he really hoped to shake the truth out of him. Auburn stood with his hands in his pockets and allowed himself to be shaken: passive, merry, invincibly stoical, he continued to laugh at Roland till his own whimsical fancy veered towards confidence.

"Look here," he said suddenly, "I'll tell you all about it. I always meant to tell you some time, only the time didn't arrive. I've got engaged: I only did it last Tuesday! You know I told you I was going to stay with some people named Carminow? It's Dodo Carminow. Her father's vicar of Stanton Mere, near Countisford. She's nineteen, and I don't think she's ever stayed in London. She's been there for the day, though, several times. She doesn't really like me much, but she likes the prospect of being Lady Auburn and having plenty of money to spend—Not serious? I am, though—rather! She trots round the parish with port wine and blankets, and she teaches a boys' Bible class. We're going to Paris for our honeymoon, and I'm pledged to buy her some clothes at Pasquin's. She's rather pretty, Roland. The odd part of it is that I shouldn't care a hang if she heard every word I've been saying, and she wouldn't either. Oh, I forgot to add that she's a religious-minded Dodo: good to the nth, in fact—you may fill up the blanks with all the Christian virtues."

"Are you in love with her?" asked Roland, as bluntly as Grace had asked the same thing of Dodo.

Auburn looked puzzled. "Bet you sixpence I am?" he said in an inquiring tone.

"Are you *mad*?" said Roland. It was purely a rhetorical question.

"Yes, I think so," said Auburn happily. "Yes, let's settle that I am, it'll save a jolly lot of trouble. Oh, Roland, you are a blessed old ass! Can't you understand all the things I haven't said? Can't you see I'm—I'm——"

"Roland, did you——"

Both men started, and turned round: but their surprise was considerably less than Mrs. Carew's. She was in her dressing-gown, and her pretty brown hair was disposed for the night in pigtails and curling-pins, and probably nothing would have been further from her thoughts than to find a very wet, very muddy Charles Auburn standing in her

drawing-room. Her looks expressed a lively mingling of horror and surprise. Auburn shook off the hand that Roland instinctively laid on his arm, and made two strides of it to the window.

"You're not to go, Auburn! It's pelting with rain—don't be an ass!"

"Mr. Auburn, don't go!" said Violet quickly. "You're going because I'm here, and I don't want you to, honestly. We can easily put you up!"

Auburn paused a moment on the gravel to turn up his coat-collar, making a slight grimace over the cold wetness of it against his cheek: his face illumined by the light from within, he smiled back at Violet, bending his head. Knowing little of women, and having gathered from books a general impression that masculine friendships were at a discount in their eyes he had expected, when Roland married, to be civilly bowed out of intimacy: it had not been so, yet Violet's frank kindness still came to him always as a surprise. "Dear souls," he said, "how very good you are to me! Add one more to the list of your many charities, and let me depart in peace."

"Why not stay in peace?" Violet suggested. "Nobody'll ask any questions."

"What on earth do you mean by that?" asked Auburn, perturbed. "Go away, I don't like you. Roland, you'd better lock up the broomsticks. Good-night, the pair of you: I hope you'll always be as good as you are happy."

"Auburn——"

Roland grasped his arm. Auburn wrenched himself free with a violence that sent Roland staggering back into the room, and vanished. They heard him cross the gravel and swing off across the lawn: the night had grown dark, and it was beginning to rain again. A gust of wind set the lights flaring, and Violet slowly closed the window.

X.

IT was evening again; one of those lovely summer nights when July clothes the earth with the beauty of moonlight. The Carminows had finished supper, and were pursuing their wonted avocations in the schoolroom, whose windows were all open down to the ground. Caron sat cross-legged on the middle threshold, smoking, and gazing out into the greyish-azure of the deep, unclouded sky. Roden was lying on the sofa, ostensibly reading; but it was only at rare intervals that he turned a leaf. These were the contemplative members of the family. Mr. Carminow had been called out to baptize a sick child, and Dickie had volunteered to escort him for the sake of the walk. Bernard had taken to himself one end of the big table and sat there immersed, surrounded by books and papers, his own private reading-lamp casting a private circle of light over his desk. Dodo at the other end was plying her sewing-machine, which made a subdued whirring noise in the quiet of the room. The wheel spun, the needle clicked; there was no other sound to be heard except an occasional rustling of Bernard's papers. Dodo resented the hush of quiet, so rare in that lively household.

"The lamp is smoking, Bernard," said she.

"Because it's badly cut," said Bernard, turning it down.

"Curious that one can't trust a woman to do the most trifling things properly! One would not think it required much brain to trim a lamp."

"What an extraordinarily evil manner you have, Bernard!" said Caron. "I wish you'd give me a lesson in the art—I know how to be rude, but I don't know how to be

offensively rude." His tone rather belied his words, but Bernard only lifted his head to stare at him for a moment, then returned to his calculations.

"Did you get any tennis up at the Trevors', Roddy?"

"Couple o' sets."

"Who was there?"

"Oh, the usual team; Grace and Mabel Blandford and Val Attwood."

"Who won?"

"Grace and I. Attwood couldn't make much of the great Mabel. She was weirder than ever, in a pink costume, with a pink sash and a red straw hat with poppies in it. Attwood was awfully sick, he had her on his hands the whole afternoon; he went directly after tea. She's a persistent angler, is that young woman, and she's got her eye on Val."

"With a cast in it," suggested Caron. "But she's not a judicious hooker. He has a fine head, has Attwood. What was that queer story he was mixed up in, though? That pal of Dickie's that he brought over here last autumn told us, don't you remember? He nearly had to send in his papers."

"Dickson never ought to have repeated it," said Dodo with some warmth, "and you're not to, either, Car—I won't have it. I hoped you'd forgotten about it. Poor Val was only twenty-two!"

"Which, taken in conjunction with fine eyes and an attractive manner, is ample ground for forgiving anybody or anything," remarked Bernard. "What did Attwood do—embezzle the mess funds or turn up drunk on parade?"

Dodo turned on him with a flash in her eyes. "Bernard, you are as hard as the nether millstone! If ever you want mercy, I hope you'll not get it."

"Oh, Bernard's the apostle of pure reason," said Caron, laughing. "Chivalry has no place in his composition—he thinks it's an unworthy weakness."

"No, I don't," said Bernard. "I keep some for you."

The wheel spun and the needle clicked: Dodo did not intervene. Caron might cross swords, if he liked, with his brother: she knew better than to engage in that unequal strife. She glanced once or twice at Roden, but he was buried in his book. Whose side was he on? That remained to be seen. Long experience had proved to Dodo that she and Roden were the only members of the family capable of standing up to Bernard in a hand-to-hand fight: Caron, hypersensitive and morbidly troubled by his lameness, was predestined to come to grief. As a rule Roden might be relied on to cover his retreat; to-night, however, his face expressed nothing but a slight weariness, which might or might not conceal disgust. Caron being on Dodo's side, and Roden refusing to take sides with Caron, did it follow that he would support Bernard against Dodo? She creased her work into a straight fold, and flattened it down methodically on the tablet under the needle. Hearts may break, but shirts must be hemmed—Bernard's shirts, for example! Such is the ingratitude of man: not that Bernard knew they were his shirts.

"Was that the front gate opening?" Dodo asked suddenly. "If so I must go—Aline's out."

"Yes, I hear some one coming up the drive," said Caron.

Through the evening quiet they could all hear distant steps on the gravel: light, firm steps, walking fast. Abruptly they ceased: the late comer had turned off across the grass. Dodo pushed her work aside, and rose. Bernard also rose, and prevented her.

"Don't trouble," he said; "I'll go."

"What do you mean, Bernard?"

"Simply that I won't have that fellow coming here any more."

"To your house!" exclaimed Caron.

"I shall have to meet him in the street, then," said Dodo.

"If you like to disgrace yourself, that's your affair. Don't be a fool, Caron. Get out of the way——"

"No," said Roden.

He dragged himself up off the sofa, looking the image of exhaustion. "Don't *you* be a fool, Bernie. Do you want to quarrel? I'm on. Call the police if you like. I've talked it over with father and he thinks it had better be I who see Auburn."

Bernard, who had not taken the pains to assure himself of Mr. Carminow's support (which was usually at his service, partly for peace sake, and partly because he had an irritating knack of being in the right), stood silent, his brow dark. Roden passed him as if he did not exist, and stepped out on the terrace, Dodo following. The little scene had gone by so quickly that Auburn was still only half-way across the lawn.

"Oh, bless you, Roddy!" said Dodo in an ardent whisper.

"Yes, I dare say," said Roden, "what a beastly little nuisance you are to drag me into a row with Bernard! Life won't be worth living for a fortnight. Cut it, now: I've got to do the heavy brother."

Dodo retired—provisionally: and Roden ran down the steps to be instantly hailed by Auburn. "Oh, I say, I've had such a dickens of a time! The exhaust pipe broke, and I clattered home like a mad dog tied to a tin kettle. Where's Dodo?"

"Indoors," said Roden.

He passed his arm through Auburn's, turned him round, and began to walk up and down the lawn, stealing keen glances at his tall companion. He liked Auburn very much, and had done so from the first: had been attracted by the sight of Auburn's overflowing vitality and high-spirited acceptance of life: but he did not trust him—why should he? Their acquaintance was in reality slight, and Roden was not impulsive, nor prone to judge by intuition. This attitude had naturally been intensified by the recent change in their relations, for what was good enough in Roden's friend was by no means good enough in Dodo's lover. Au-

burn meanwhile was racking his brains to account for a reception which struck him as peculiarly chilly. At length he was driven to ask, "Is anything wrong?"

"There has been rather a row on at home."

"A row about me?"

"Yes: and I said I'd talk to you because I knew you couldn't be expected to stand Bernard's methods, and the Vicar funked it. Father has had a letter——"

"From Sir Charles?"

"How do you know?"

"I divined it. Continue."

"First let me say that the writer's prejudice was obvious. He had had your letter announcing the engagement: he disliked the idea of it—for which I don't blame him: she's no catch—and his express purpose was to break it off. He wasn't particularly civil to my father, or any of us. He refused point-blank to consent; and he declared that in doing so he was thinking as much of Dodo as he was of you."

"Really? Why?"

"He paints you in lurid colors—don't lose your temper if you can help it. He says you've been pretty wild."

Auburn laughed out: the situation was not without irony. "Wild, have I? that's rather droll. Did I make love to housemaids, or throw the decanters at the footmen's heads?—My good Roden, is it possible that you take him seriously?"

"Seriously enough to want a categorical denial."

"Then I give you a categorical denial—it's a damnable lie."

"Can you prove your words?"

Auburn jerked his arm away and swung round on Roden with so angry a flash that the latter thought he was going to be knocked down, but on the brink of an outbreak Auburn checked himself, and laughed instead. "How you must enjoy all this! So do I, but I'd rather be cross-

examined than cross-examiner. You're a cool hand, Roden."

"You must let me remind you that we really know next to nothing of you. Your father gives you a bad character, and you retort by swearing at him: he proves nothing—neither do you."

"Oh, you're logical enough: I'm not blaming you. But the upshot of it is that Mr. Carminow withdraws his consent, I suppose, till I can clear myself?"

"He withdraws his consent till your father gives his."

"Oh? That's very funny. Won't it do if I can get a certificate of character?"

"Hardly. You see he hates the idea of Dodo marrying into a family that doesn't welcome her. We have no money," Roden's clear and concise utterance lent point to his words: "and so we think the more of ourselves. Sir Charles evidently believes we've conspired to catch you. You can't expect my father to like that."

"No."

"Besides, he hates the idea of you and Sir Charles being on bad terms over it. He's a firm believer in the family tie, you know, and he thinks—I'm not sure I don't agree with him—it must be partly your own fault if you don't get on. Sir Charles writes pretty decently about you—his only son, and all that: he certainly is more civil to you than——"

"Than I was to him?"

"I dare say you think I have no right to say this."

"Not at all: as Dodo's brother I have given you the right to examine into my private affairs."

"Well, yes: I think you have," said Roden roundly. Auburn laughed again. His face was as expressionless as a mask, and he would not meet Roden's eyes.

"Quite so. Am I to see Dodo?"

"Father won't say no, but would rather not say yes."

"And Dodo acquiesces, of course? What it is to belong

to a virtuous family! Thank heaven, there's no risk of that for me. Never mind: I'll go down to-morrow and make it up with Sir Charles, and all shall go merry as a marriage bell. Will that satisfy Mr. Carminow?"

"You will go down to Auburn?"

"Certainly: what else should I do? I haven't seen Sir Charles for ten years, so it will be a touching reunion."

Roden was vaguely dissatisfied, though he could not have said why. "Are you in a rage?" he asked, trying to read Auburn's face. "You've got a temper, I should fancy. Are you annoyed with me or with him?"

"You don't know what you're talking about, Roddy: you don't in the least understand the situation, or him, or me. I shall get back to town to-night and go down by the one o'clock train from Waterloo: that gets to Auburn towards evening. I shall catch Sir Charles after dinner when he's in his mellowest mood. I'll bring over the olive-branch next day. Well, now I think I'll say good-night: I'm dead sleepy." He made as if to hold out his hand, but checked himself. Simultaneously Roden seized it and wrung it.

"You've been awfully decent over this."

"Yes, I've borne with your impertinence."

"You see," Roden paused, visibly screwing himself to the sticking point, "we're very fond of Dodo."

"Very proper sentiments, my son," was all the answer Auburn vouchsafed: nevertheless his eyes softened.

Man proposes. As Auburn walked down the avenue after parting with Roden, a small lithe figure slid down from its seat on the arm of a fir and came towards him.

"Dodo!" said Auburn, recoiling, "go away—I'm not allowed to play with you."

"You can't cut a lady, it's not polite," said Dodo, advancing and holding out her hands. Auburn took them: she put up her face. Auburn shook his head.

"No: I'm on my honor."

"Oh!" said Dodo: "—or you don't want to?"

"I desire it of all things."

"What's the matter with your eyes, Charles? they look very queer."

"The matter with my eyes? Nothing! What's wrong with them?"

"Altogether you're not like yourself. Where are you going?"

He parried with another question. "Aren't you afraid to talk to a dangerous, dissipated scamp like me?"

"That is utter nonsense," said Dodo slowly. "I don't believe a word of it."

"Not when you have it on such good authority? I'm his only son, and he's devotedly attached to me. Think how painful it must have been for him to have to give me away!"

"What's the matter, Charles?"

"Nothing. I'm tired: I've had a long day, and the car wasn't running well. Let me go, Dodo."

"Go where?"

"To London. I'm not fit to sleep at the Vicarage."

"Oh dear me!" said Dodo, crushing her fingers together. "I do so wish men wouldn't meddle in things they don't understand. What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"Make it up with my dear father."

"Charles, you're not going to Auburn?"

"Faith, but I am, though!"

He stood smiling down at her with indolent, ironical eyes. "You may think of me as folded in the parental embrace. What, aren't you touched? You don't appreciate the beauties of the family tie. When a father doesn't get on with his only son, darling, there are certain to be faults on both sides. I'm going to ask him to forgive me, and take me to his breast again."

"You shan't go, Charles."

She stepped in front of the gate. Auburn, however, was no less resolute: he slipped his arm round her waist, lifted her in his clasp like a child, and set her aside. His strength, the silent laughter in his eyes, and the realization of her own weakness brought the color to Dodo's cheek and put her to silence. Meanwhile, Auburn had passed out into the road. "Oh, don't," cried Dodo, "dear, don't do it!" But he only waved his hand to her and went on his way.

XI.

“**R**ODEN, are you awake?”

“No,” said Roden, retiring an inch or so farther under the bedclothes. “Fast asleep. Go away!”

Dodo perched herself on the bed, tucking up her bare feet under her, and folded her arms as tightly as the tightness of the red dressing-gown would permit. “Have you got any money?” Roden snored. “It’s not the least use your doing that, said Dodo calmly. “Don’t be silly!”

Roden emerged, looking very cross in the pale midnight moonlight, his fair hair much ruffled, his grey eyes blinking. As he was notoriously a light sleeper, Dodo felt justified in ignoring this ostentatious drowsiness. “Have you got any money?” she repeated, “and if so, how much?”

“There’s a shilling and three halfpennies on the dressing-table which you can have if you’ll only go away. What do you want money for in the middle of the night?”

“I want you to go to Auburn to-morrow and get hold of Charles.”

Roden left off yawning and looked mutely at his sister.

“I want you to prevent him from going to see his father.”

“My dear child, what are you afraid of?”

“I don’t know.”

“I don’t see what’s going to happen to him unless Sir Charles locks him up in the cellar: and if I were Auburn I wouldn’t be green enough to go into the cellar.”

“Yet you’ll go.”

“How can I? He has twelve hours’ start of me, and I

don't know where to find him! Be rational, dear child—even if you are in love."

"You can easily waylay him, for he doesn't mean to go to Sir Charles till after dinner. Call at Auburn and leave a message for him."

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep," said Roden, with more relevance than appeared at first, "but will they come when I do call for them? Your beloved Charles is fairly obstinate. I think he will tell me to go to Jericho."

"Possibly, but he won't tell me to go to Jericho. I'll give you a note for him."

"Nonsense: I'm not going."

"Yes, you are," said Dodo, coaxing. "You know, Roddy, I'm not an idiot. I shouldn't say this without reason. I know a great deal more about Charles than you do, and I—I dread——" she broke off. "I don't like it: I'm miserable about it. Be sweet to me, darling!"

"What's the fare?"

"Nineteen and a penny."

Roden shook his head. "Circumstances over which I have no control——"

"I've got seven and fourpence." Roden shook his head. "Well, borrow from Caron."

Roden shook his head again. "My child, I have."

"Isn't there anything we could sell?"

"Not unless you could bring yourself to part with that dressing-gown."

"Don't be so silly. Of course father would give it us, but——"

"*But——*" Roden nodded assent. "Tell you what—*borrow from Bernard!*"

The proposal was startling. "But he won't give it you!" objected Dodo.

"Child, child, what a pitiful lack of imagination you display! Would you mind handing me my covert coat off that chair?" Dodo gave it him, and he got up, wrapping it

round him over his pyjamas—reconciled to the journey that lay before him by the exhilarating prospect of committing a burglary. Dodo could not help laughing as she watched him gravely getting into his slippers. "It'll serve Bernard right," he said firmly; "bleed a little of the self-righteousness out of him. Wonder where he keeps his tin, by the bye? He's such a beastly screw, I shouldn't be surprised to find he locks it up." Roden's tone was injured; he himself had never been known to lock money up but once, when he hid away a £10 note in a drawer, lost the key, and forgot what he had done with the note, which came to light some months later, when Bernard had occasion to break open the desk. "Never mind, you wait a sec.," said the chronically impetuous one, cautiously tip-toeing out of the room. "I'll rummage out his caches."

In point of fact he was away some little time, and when he returned Dodo had curled herself up on the pillow and was asleep in good earnest. Roden stood for a few moments silently regarding her. Sleep had effaced the marks of thought and action, leaving her very fair, quaint, and childish. "She looks like a chit of twelve!" he thought. His own face had taken on a much older and sterner expression than it generally wore. The brother and sister were curiously alike in feature and in coloring, but there the resemblance ended, for Dodo was genuinely youthful, while Roden was a man rather old for his eight-and-twenty years, and trying more or less deliberately to put the clock back.

Of all the Carminows, Roden, seemingly the most commonplace, was perhaps in reality the least normal. Inheriting a strain of his mother's quality, he had in him the makings of a saint or a martyr: an intense silent faith, a courage ascetically austere. Underneath the veil of manner his life burned with a white flame of purity, and endurance, and singleness of heart. He kept his own counsel, however. So far, of all earthly emotions the one that swayed his life most strongly was a deep love for his sister:

but those waters ran so still that Dodo herself hardly knew of them. Liking in Roden, or even love, by no means implied confidence. To Auburn, on one painful occasion, he had been compelled to be explicit, but sorely against the grain; and yet he liked Auburn well. He was one of those few men who are capable of extremes.

"She looks like a child of twelve!" he thought. "I wonder what Auburn thinks he sees in her? There is a lot of devilry in Dodo, but he can't have seen that—what does he know of her? It's not as if she were pretty, and she's abominably badly turned out as a rule. I'd give twopence to know what he thinks he likes her for, and whether it'll last. Give her another ten years, and she might hold him: but *Dodo*——? He's straight, though, is Auburn. I'd take his word as I would Bernard's. If she must be married, I'd as soon it were he as any one, but what a vulgar business it all is, to be sure! I am convinced there is a heaven we can't enter hand in hand."

He touched her arm. "Dodo, wake up, will you?"

Dodo sat up, broad awake in an instant. "Have you got it?"

"Rather! He keeps it loose in his trousers' pockets. Very bad plan to keep money loose in your trousers' pocket, especially when you've a hole in it."

"Roddy, you're a genius! I'm awfully grateful to you."

"So you ought to be. Frankly, you know, I think this is the most idiotic idea that ever entered a human brain."

"Yes, I know it is," assented Dodo placidly, "but it's much better to be idiotic than miserable. I shall have no fears for Charles now I know you'll be there to catch him—you're so reliable, so intelligent: I have implicit faith——"

"No go," said Roden. "I only got two quid, and I shall want all that myself."

To Auburn from Stanton Mere is no great distance as the crow flies, but by rail it is a different matter. Charles

Auburn, into whose head the idea of saving money on a railway fare had never penetrated, rode over to Countisford in time to catch the last train to London, transacted a little agreeable business with Manton the great jeweller, and caught an afternoon express down again: Roden left early the next morning, took a cross-country route, and spent his day in slow trains and at junctions.

It was close on nine o'clock when he stepped out on the little country platform of Riversley, the station nearest to the hamlet of Auburn. There was still a great deal of light, for it was a clear sunset, but the colors were fast fading: gone was the rose-red over the west, gone the rose-pink from the hollyhocks that stood up tall and stiff in the parched borders beside the platform. Roden made up to the ticket collector, in quest of direction.

"Go along th' road for a matter of a couple o' miles," said the ticket collector drowsily, "or three it mi-be, an' you'll fin' it on y'r right."

"Thank you," said Roden, languidly polite, "and perhaps you can tell me if you have seen anything of Mr. Charles Auburn to-day? I believe he is down here."

"No, I ain't: I never heard tell on him. I know th' ol' governor, happen it's him you mean? ol' Charley Auburn."

"No, not Sir Charles," answered Roden the imperturbable, "his son."

The ticket collector jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the stationmaster. "Ask th' ol' man. You mus'n' go stoppin' th' way."

Realizing that he was doing so, Roden fell back to address the stationmaster, when he was himself addressed by one of his fellow-passengers, a tall, dark man in whose pleasant voice there lingered the faint traces of a Devonshire burr.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think I heard you asking for Charles Auburn?"

"Yes, I was," said Roden. "I have followed him and

missed him, and I'm not quite sure which way he has gone. Can you direct me, sir?"

Roland Carew turned to the stationmaster. "Raymond, have you seen Mr. Charles to-day?"

"Why no, sir! I didn't know he'd been down. What train did he come by?"

"One of the evening trains," said Roden. Mr. Raymond shook his head.

"I've been in the goods office this hour and more, and Walters here don't know him. Thompson!" beckoning to a porter, "here's Mr. Carew inquiring after Mr. Charles Auburn. Did he come by the 8.29?" Thompson looked doubtful. "He's very tall, you know—well over six feet, isn't he sir? And very free with his money."

"There was a very tall gentleman got out of a first-class smoker, sir, and gave young Brown a shillin' for pickin' up his walkin'-stick. Would that be him?"

"In a grey suit and a Panama hat and carrying a light cane? That was he," said Roden; while Mr. Raymond expressed what was evidently a genuine regret that he hadn't had the pleasure of a word with him. Upon further inquiry it transpired that Auburn had left by a field path in the direction of his home, and Roden, having satisfactorily established the fact of his arrival in the minds of a cloud of witnesses, was about to follow him, when Roland intervened.

"May I introduce myself? I am Roland Carew. I dare say you have never heard my name," he said with his grave smile, "but I am one of Charles Auburn's oldest friends, and as my house is on the way to Auburn I think it quite likely he may call in there. Will you let me drive you down? My phaeton is waiting."

Roden, who was not fond of walking, accepted with effusion, and explained his own identity, while Roland led the way towards the road, where a trim groom stood at the head of a handsome chestnut horse, which was harnessed to a very high phaeton, and appeared to be anxious to get rid

of it. "Jump in," said Roland, viewing these manœuvres with an equanimity which Roden did not altogether share, "look sharp behind, Stephens—he's rather fresh to-night, isn't he?"

"Yessir," said Stephens; which, as Claude Duval (the name was of Violet's coinage) had dragged the phaeton sideways across the road and was doing his best to back it up the embankment, was a superfluous remark. Roden got in, philosophically reflecting that a man can die but once: Stephens scrambled up behind: and they went racketing off at a pace that tried the strength of Roland's wrists. "I had no idea that Auburn was coming down here again," he said, with a frown for which Claude Duval was evidently not responsible: "is he going to see Sir Charles, do you think?"

"I believe so."

"I hope nothing fresh has gone wrong?" Roden hesitated. "I think I may ask you to speak openly. You are the best judge of that, of course, but Auburn does not keep many secrets from me."

"It's rather a ridiculous affair altogether," said Roden, laughing. "I'm here to satisfy a whim of my sister's and what sort of reception I shall get from Auburn I don't like to speculate upon. She wanted to prevent his going to Auburn, but thanks to the trains not fitting I'm afraid I'm too late for that. However, I'll tell you the facts, and you shall give me your opinion of them."

He outlined the situation: the letter of Sir Charles, the attitude assumed by Mr. Carminow, the nature of Auburn's errand, and the lurid vagueness of Dodo's fears. "I don't know what she thinks is going to happen," he explained, "but there was no way to pacify her, so I gave in."

Roland gave the horse a cut with the whip that sent him on at a gallop. "It's four miles to Auburn: if he got out of the train by half-past eight he'll be there by half-past nine. On the other hand, he may have gone in to

Ferndean to get something to eat. We'll call in there first, and if he's not there we'll walk on up to Auburn together. We shall probably find him with Sir Charles."

He spoke in a tone so confused and perturbed that Roden glanced at him in wonder: but he said no more, and they were going so fast that Roden's attention was pretty well taken up with holding himself and his hat on. Shaving the gate-post by the fraction of an inch, they dashed up the avenue of Ferndean at a canter: at length the porch was reached and Roland pulled up, jumped down, and hurried into the house. A minute later he reappeared, followed by Violet. "Well?" said Roden.

"No, he's not here—not been here. Shall we walk on up to Auburn?"

"Wouldn't Mr. Carminow like some dinner first?"

"My wife," said Roland, preoccupied and hasty.

"Oh, duty first, don't you think, Mrs. Carew?" said Roden.

Evidently he need not have feared to be thought to have come on a fool's errand. Roland was betraying uncontrollable nervousness, while even Violet met his reply with a glimmer of relief.

Roland sent the phaeton away and took him by a short cut across the fields and through the woods of Auburn, through the wet grass and under the heavy midsummer leafage. The sunset was all gone now, and the world was white with moonlight. Vaulting a fence, they came into the Auburn avenue and gained the house. Roland rang the bell; after some moments came the noise of bolts and bars unfastening, and the door was opened.

"Mr. Charles isn't here, is he, Davis?"

"Mr. Charles, sir?"

"Isn't he here?"

"No, sir; he was at Mrs. Burnet's day before yesterday, but I didn't see nothing of him. He haven't bin nigh the place to-day, so far as I've heard on."

"Not here? Are you sure?"

"Certain, sir. Sir Charles always likes this door shut up of an evening because of all the silver in the hall. Mr. Charles haven't bin near the place this fifteen years come Michaelmas: he don't never come here now, sir."

Roland pulled out his watch: it was close on a quarter to ten. Relief, not unmixed with bewilderment, appeared on his face. "It can't have been he who was at the station after all," he said, turning to Roden. "He would have been here half an hour ago. There must be some mistake."

He turned back to the butler. Davis had been many years in the family, and his fidelity was unimpeachable, his discretion no less so. "Look here, Davis, this gentleman has followed Mr. Charles to give him an important message. If by any chance he should come here to-night, or if he comes to-morrow morning, will you give him this note? And say that Mr. Carminow is at Ferndean, and must see him before he goes to Sir Charles or anywhere else."

"Mr. Carminow, sir? Very good, sir," said Davis, eyeing with unconcealed curiosity the young gentleman whom he readily divined to be the brother of his future mistress. The two men left the house together. When they were well out of earshot, Roden put a question that had lain long in the recesses of his mind.

"Mr. Carew, what are *you* afraid of?"

Quick and earnest came Roland's answer. "Of a quarrel."

"A serious quarrel?"

"Indeed I think it is but too likely. Consider what provocation Auburn has had! and much more, very much more than you know of. I would not for ten thousand pounds have had him meet Sir Charles to-night. Davis is a fellow in a thousand, though: he will see to it that Auburn gets your note and the message, which I purposely left too vague to be disregarded—supposing, that is, that he does by any chance turn up at Auburn this evening.

We may find him at Ferndean. Or he may have gone in to Lesbia's: we'll call and make sure."

Lesbia's cottage, however, proved to be deserted: no lights were burning behind the closed windows, and the discovery of a can of milk and a loaf of bread left on the doorstep settled the question. "Both out," said Roland: "I believe there's a flower show on at Hillingdon. Well, now we'll go home: you'll be glad of something to eat."

It was so evidently taken for granted that Roden's night would be spent at Ferndean that the traveler acquiesced without protest, being really rather tired and very hungry. It was close on ten before they reached the house, where supper awaited them, but no sign of Auburn. After the meal followed cigars in the billiard-room, and a game of billiards, cut short by Roden's yawns, which he was unable to conceal: nor was he at all sorry to be ordered off to bed.

He was quite ready to go to bed. Yet, oddly enough, when he was in bed he could not sleep. He lay listening to the various sounds in the house, gradually diminishing till all was quiet: only through the open window the distant "Hoo! hoo!" of an owl came plaintively to his ears. It was a hot night, and he tossed to and fro, restless, wakeful. "I wish I hadn't had that coffee," he thought to himself. "What an idiot I was!" The fact remained that he had had the coffee, and the coffee, or something else, was now in possession of his brain. He got up and went to the window; it was a brilliant night, bathed in moonshine. Less than a mile away he could discern quite clearly the dark masses of the Auburn woods. Roland's words rang in his ears: strange words, spoken in all sincerity by one who was well qualified to judge.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of a quarrel."

Indolent Roden had early grasped the first principle of indolence, that it is often less trouble to do a thing than to argue oneself out of an inclination to do it. Rapidly he

dressed himself, reserving only his boots, which he carried in his hand: opened the door and went softly downstairs. He had noticed that the billiard-room windows were not shuttered; the door was locked on the outside—he had only to unlock it, and let himself out into the garden. Across the lawn, down the avenue, out into the white road, the road he had traversed with Roland earlier in the evening: at length he reached the gates of Auburn, and turned in at them, noticing as he did so that a lamp was burning in an upper window of Mrs. Burnet's cottage. Lesbia was home, then, home from the flower show.

Far off in the valley a church clock was chiming the quarter after twelve as he turned in at the gates of Auburn.

XII.

AUBURN had indeed come by the 8.29, and had taken an hour to cover the four miles to Auburn, gaining the lodge gates by solitary and unfrequented paths, partly because he enjoyed the coolness of the evening woods, and partly because he was in no mind to meet his friends. When he reached the Auburn avenue it was the loveliest summer night imaginable, and the lawns and shrubbery were obscured by a haze of moonlight; mist lay in swathes, ankle-deep over the turf, but where the river flowed slow and quiet it rolled along in clouds, as if that sluggish water were a steaming flood.

He had not visited the house for fourteen years. Yet, when he came in sight of it, he found no change. There it stood—a great grey block, pierced with half a dozen rows of windows: featureless, colorless, gaunt, more like an asylum than a private dwelling. The gardens were beautiful, however, and kept up in the pink of perfection. The borders under the walls were dense with masses of bloom: pale phlox, thickets of shaded hydrangea, wallflowers the color of a tiger's coat and saturating the air with odor. The rear of the house was drowned in woods: from the front a smooth expanse of grass rolled down, girdled by woods, to the river, beyond which ran the road, and then more woods, and a stretch of plain country bordered by a low range of hills. By day in this open district one could discern the smoking chimneys, by night the lamps in the upper windows, of Ferndean, less than a mile away.

Roland's mistake lay in taking for granted that Auburn would go in by the hall door. So far from doing so, in his

anxiety to avoid his friends, Auburn made his way direct to the French windows of the dining-room, where he felt pretty confident of finding Sir Charles. Ah, how familiar it was in every detail! The room was oval and lofty, and very dark: floor and walls were of oak, the latter richly carved. Facing him stood an oaken buffet, piled with valuable plate: the high-backed chairs, the great oval table, were all of oak, and scarcely less precious than the silver. A dozen candles set in branched candelabra dispersed a scanty light over wines that glowed red and brown like jewels through their long-stemmed, fragile glasses. All was unchanged.

Yes, all was unchanged: and least changed of all was the man who filled the great chair at the farther end of the hall. Sir Charles was in evening dress, trim and handsome, his big shoulders squared against their oak background, his head, with its crown of thick white hair, held gallantly high. Clean-shaven, regular-featured, sunburned, he was the very type and flower of the English country gentleman—a father any son might be proud of.

He had, in fact, a constitution as robust as his conscience. At sixty-five, he rode to hounds four days a week, and wrung from a countryside which detested him reluctant acknowledgment of his pluck and judgment. His manner in the hunting field was always jovial, and his kind smiling good looks baffled the universal pugnacity. Yet he had no friends. In the country there must be something radically wrong with a man if he cannot win the sympathy of his enemies' enemies. But Radicals and Conservatives, Church and Dissent, high and low, rich and poor, one with another made common cause against Sir Charles.

At all events his nerves were steady. Few men like to be watched, least of all the Ishmaels of society: yet Sir Charles, when he caught sight of Auburn at the window, betrayed no alarm. He turned in his chair and laid a hand on the bell, then addressed the stranger with easy courtesy.

"Will you have the goodness either to come in or to go away?"

Auburn replied by coming forward into the candle-light. Sir Charles took his hand from the bell and sat looking fixedly at his son, a slight smile playing round his lips. "So it's you, is it? Well, upon my word, sir, this is pretty unceremonious! I didn't expect you, Charlie my boy, but I am devilish glad to see you." He pointed to a chair and Auburn sat down, throwing his gloves and cane on the table. "Give yourself a glass of wine."

"No wine, thanks. I dined in the train."

"But you're going to stay the night, of course?"

"No, I'm afraid I shall have to get off as soon as possible, thanks all the same."

The unbiased spectator—which Auburn certainly was not—might have detected a shade of something very like disappointment in Sir Charles' blue eyes. "I should have thought you would like to renew your acquaintance with the old place, seeing it must be every day of ten years since you were down here, but you know your own business best, no doubt. Well, now let's have a look at you?" He stretched out his hand, and the candle flames were drowned in a glare of electricity. "Why, you're not such a bad-looking fellow after all! These ten years have made a man of you—you've grown up, filled out, developed! You're not much like me, though: I can't think where you get your brown eyes and red hair from."

"So much the worse for me, sir."

"Gad, if poor Maude had been a more attractive woman——"

"You look very fit, sir."

"I don't wear badly, for a man of sixty-five, do I? I should make a poor text for a parson to preach on. Try one of these cigars, I can recommend them."

"Thanks, I will," said Auburn.

He took one, and lit it from his father's. "It's a long

while since I was down here, but the place hasn't changed much. You keep it in pretty good order."

"Yes, I'm rather vain of my garden. You should see it by daylight. The roses have done pretty well this year. I believe Ranson expects to take two or three first prizes at the Hillingdon flower show, which was on this afternoon."

"That's a novel interest for you to take up," said Auburn, raising his eyebrows. Sir Charles smiled unmoved.

"My vices are leaving me off, my boy—that's where it is. One must do something to kill time. Tell me about yourself, these years have been fuller of incident for you than for me. You seem to have traveled a good deal—I've heard of you from time to time in all quarters of the globe."

"I've had my wander-years," said Auburn. He crossed one knee over the other and leaned back in his chair, one arm thrown out along the table: his attitude brought to light a likeness between the two men that lay far deeper than the superficial dissimilarity of coloring, a likeness in height and frame and pose, in the carriage of the head, and the structure of hand and foot. "I've globe-trotted with a will till I'm sick of globe-trotting, and now I want to settle down. That's what I came over to talk to you about. You had my letter?"

"I did, my boy."

"Yours to Mr. Carminow was, I suppose, indirectly in answer to mine."

"I ought to have written to you too, I know I ought. But I never was fond of letter-writing, and I guessed you'd see what I said."

"I did not actually see it, but Roden Carminow—my brother-in-law that is to be—told me what was in it. You were rather rough on me, weren't you? Writing to a clergyman, it was pretty severe of you to say what you did about my morals."

"It was: you're right. I felt that very strongly. But

I thought it was my duty to be frank with him. You can't suppose I liked saying it?"

"I don't know what grounds you were going on."

Sir Charles laughed. "Oh, I know a thing or two," he said, shaking his head in genial reproof. "You can't humbug your old father, Charlie. I've been young myself, and I know what sort of blood you've got in your veins. Bless me! I don't blame you—young men must sow their wild oats, to use a rather hackneyed phrase: but I didn't feel that I could conscientiously whitewash you to Mr. Carminow. I suppose he's a man of the world, if he is a clergyman—he must know that young fellows can't all be expected to live like Saint Anthony."

Auburn puffed a wreath of smoke before replying, and watch it slowly twine away in faint blue rings.

"Not as a rule. But it's a curious fact, though I can hardly understand it myself, that I've never gone in much for that kind of thing. Where you got your information from I don't know, but it wasn't correct."

"Oh, no!" said Sir Charles, winking. "Certainly not!"

"Well, it wasn't."

"Come now, Charlie! I'm not going to believe that, you know."

Auburn gave up that tack and tried another.

"I see I shan't convince you," he said, "so we'll drop the point. But, my dear father, you really must listen very seriously to what I'm going to say. You've written to Mr. Carminow to forbid my marriage. I needn't remind you that you've no legal right to interfere; you know that better than I could tell you. Besides, you have a moral right, and that means a great deal to Mr. Carminow. I want you to reconsider your words."

"I'm afraid I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want you to make a mess of your life."

"Marrying Miss Carminow won't do that."

The elder man laughed. "And that's where we differ. Why, the girl hasn't a penny! I've known some impecunious parsons' daughters who were very fetching, and so, I don't doubt, is your young lady—in any capacity except that of a wife."

"But you want me to get married."

"Want you to get married! I should rather think I do!" Sir Charles said hotly. "Here you are at thirty-five, and no family! I don't ask you to remember your duty to the State, but you might think of the House! Suppose you were killed to-night in the train, what would become of the title? I've told you over and over again that it would go to some brute of a fellow out in Australia, without an 'h' to his name—'Kid' Auburn's grandson, the descendant of a man who had to cut and run to keep out of jail! But you youngsters are all alike, you think of nothing but yourselves. Of course I want you to marry!"

"Then why place difficulties in my way?"

"I didn't say I wanted you to marry a country parson's daughter without a penny, did I? Yes, the name's good enough—but what sort of breeding, what sort of manners can a girl of that class possess? Your wife ought to be able to cut a dash in the county, give dinners and balls and all that sort of thing. I don't think so much of the money question even—though you'd have found yourself in Queer Street long ago but for the way I've nursed the property: but I do insist upon it that you shan't marry a girl who tumbles over her own train."

"But should I be likely to want to marry a girl who tumbled over her own train!"

Quintessential cynicism spoke in the lift of Sir Charles' eyebrows, the shrug of his shoulders. "Oh, when a man's in love——!"

"What's your idea of being in love?"

"Gratification of the senses, my boy—purely that and nothing more. You don't like it? I didn't grasp it so

clearly myself when I was your age. Wait till you're sixty-five! I've seen a good deal of it in my time, good and bad, *pour le bon motif* and the other kind, and you may take it from me that that's what it comes to. You believe you love her because she has an intellect and a soul, but you take it from me, Charlie my boy, that the odds are she has nothing but a body."

"Oh, you're altogether wrong about it," said Auburn, smiling.

He knocked the ash from his cigar and laid it down on the tray, the light falling on his dark lined face and curiously expressionless eyes. "The whole thing isn't a bit as you imagine it. The Carminows are of good family, to begin with: Mr. Carminow is related to the Amhersts, and his wife was a Wray of Suffolk. And they don't want me to marry Dodo at all; they dislike the notion intensely, because I'm not orthodox. You think they caught me, but you're mistaken, honestly you are. Dodo's only nineteen, you know, and very unworldly—I'm sure you'd like her if you met her."

"Pretty, eh?" said Sir Charles.

"Very pretty."

"What's she like?"

"Rather small, very slight and fair: blue eyes, fair hair, pale complexion. That sounds characterless, but she isn't; she has quite a will of her own."

"Pretty figure?"

"Very; she carries herself like a Frenchwoman."

"Not my style," Sir Charles said, shrugging his big shoulders. "I like them more full-blown. Every man to his taste—I dare say she's a taking little thing. You've evidently a bad case, too. That comes of not getting it over early: I've seen it thousands of times if I've seen it once—there's no fool like a man of five-and-thirty when he falls in love for the first time."

"Quite so. As a matter of fact I am most devoutly in

love, and an utter fool about Dodo. It takes some time, you know, to get over it when it's a bad case. If I don't marry Dodo, it'll be five years before I look at another woman. I'm not keen on feminine society, as you are. I shall probably go off into the wilds and solace myself by shooting or getting shot."

"I see all that," Sir Charles nodded. "You've got the pull on me there, I'm not denying it. They won't let you have her without my blessing: but if I don't let you have her you won't have any one else. Is that how the affair stands?"

"Precisely. How quickly you take my point! You state the case like a lawyer."

"It's a confounded awkward case for me. Of course I want you to marry; I want an heir to the property. Is she pretty healthy?"

"Who?"

"The girl—Dodo."

"Very, I believe."

"That's in her favor. But you ought to marry money, my boy. We're not rich, as incomes go nowadays; and with these confounded land taxes we shan't get any richer. Birth, she has birth: but birth is exactly what I wouldn't stickle for. We've got birth ourselves. What you ought to do is to marry some fine, healthy brewer's or banker's daughter—bring a little interest into the family, some American pork or English beer: I shouldn't object to grocery if it was big enough. Then the next step would be a seat in Parliament and a peerage. But you'll never do that if you marry a country parson's daughter. I say, Charlie."

"Well?"

"You're set on getting this girl?"

"Set."

"Must you marry her?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. If she's fond of you—which I dare say she is, for you're a good-lookin' fellow—you ought to be able to get round her. There'd be a bit of a scandal, I dare say, but it'd be worth it."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind the scandal," said Auburn. "We're used to that in our family. It's our notion of the domestic tie."

He had time for one last gleam of bitter merriment, an ironical laugh at his own and Mr. Carminow's expense, before mind and reflection were drowned under the incoming tide of anger, long resolutely dammed. He rose to his feet, and Sir Charles rose too, and they faced each other, Sir Charles flushed and startled, Auburn deadly white.

"You young puppy, what do you mean by that?"

"How many women have you ruined in your time? They were better off than the one you married, though: you didn't kill them."

"What—what do you mean?"

"As you killed my mother."

"Good God!"

"Don't swear, there's nothing to be afraid of."

"You young devil!" Sir Charles cried out.

He had his share of vices, but he was no coward, and Auburn's cold, jeering face fired him to a blaze of temper. He caught up Auburn's stick from the table and struck at his son—no mean blow, for a man of sixty-five. But in a twinkling Auburn had seized him by both wrists and bent them back. For an appreciable space of time Sir Charles was in danger, for Auburn, with his great strength, was forcing him to his knees, and had both will and power to beat him down. The survival of the civilized instinct, so slow to die in modern men, came between him and the red, angry, startled face: he shook Sir Charles from him with a violence that sent the elder man staggering to the wall, and went to the window. He had closed it when he came in, and the hasp caught; he struck the glass with his hand,

shivered it, and went out into the night. It was then close on eleven o'clock.

Towards the small hours even a midsummer night gets cold. When Auburn began to get himself in hand again he was lying on the grass near the river, his clothes saturated with dew and with the fog that rolled between him and the declining moon. He looked at his watch: it said five minutes to one. What an interminable night!

He had been walking up and down the paths among the shrubberies for close on two hours, in a frame of mind bordering on madness: the flame that sprang of thirty years of smoldering hate. Later he found that he could piece together, under the touch of circumstances that recalled them, a moment here and a moment there, as one does by dreams: but there was no coherency in these recollections. "It is as if I had been drunk!" he said to himself. He was sane and sober now, and inclined to wonder at himself for getting in such a passion; his interest in the whole affair had sunk, for the time being, to zero.

He pulled himself to his feet. He was wet through and aching with fatigue and cold: every blade of grass was tipped with a glistening drop, and the print of his own body was outlined dark upon the white, wet turf. Where could he find a lodging for the night? Village inns go to bed at ten; friendship, even that of a Roland Carew, draws the line at a visit in the small hours. But there was one door which would never, as he well believed, be closed against him. He found his way back to the avenue and out of the great gates and up the narrow path between the gooseberry bushes to Rose Cottage. All was dark and still, except for that one candle burning in the sick girl's room. Well did Auburn know Lesbia's window: he threw up a handful of pebbles and heard them rattle on the glass like hail. Scarcely a moment later, Lesbia's dark head looked out of the open casement.

"Who's there?"

"I—Charles Auburn. Will you take me in?"

"My bairn, where have you been?"

"Up at the house. Let me in, there's a dear."

Lesbia vanished. Auburn anticipated delay, but no: in a moment later she opened the door to him, fully dressed, and with her long black hair coiled behind her head, as she always wore it. "What have you been doing, Charles? Where do you come from? Why!" she grasped his arm, "you're wet! What is it?"

"Dew," said Auburn cheerfully. "I've been wandering about in the fog since eleven o'clock. I've only had a scrap with Sir Charles."

"A scrap with Sir Charles!" repeated Lesbia.

She led the way into the kitchen. Auburn followed; in a twinkling the lamp was lighted, and the fire, laid ready for the morning. "Sit," said Lesbia, drawing forward a chair. Auburn dropped into it and held out his long brown hands to the quickening flames. Lesbia set on a tiny kettle to boil, then vanished, to return with a tumbler and a bottle of whiskey. "There now, drink that," said she, administering hot grog with a practical air. Auburn drank it off with a grimace (he preferred it cold), but was immediately the better for it, and awoke to a languid interest in things around him. "Why aren't you in bed?" he asked between yawns.

"Jeannie's ill: I've been up with her half the night. She would go to see the rose show at Hillingdon, and it broke her down. Now what'll I do with you?"

She stood regarding him, hands on hips. "Here's the time," she said with a grim humor that was all her own, "when I begin to miss that departed saint of mine. If I'd a man's shirt and a pair of breeches in the house, I'd have those wet clothes off you and you should go to bed in a Christian way, but I doubt you'd not be much the better of one of my nightgowns. Eh! I never thought, when I

followed him to the grave, that I should come to wish him back again—but there's no telling what may happen.'"

In the end she made him up a bed in front of the kitchen fire, piled clothes on him till he was suffocated, and left him sworn over not to throw them off: and for the rest of that strange midsummer night Charles Auburn slept like the dead.

XIII.

A WAKENED at five by Lesbia's entrance, Auburn was packed upstairs to enjoy a cold tub in a garret and to shave himself with the razor of the unregretted Alexander, and by half-past six was ready to be off. He did not, however, return by Riversley, for he found Lesbia preparing to tramp into Hillingdon to get fresh medicine for Jeannie, and could not do less than offer to go instead, though at the price of a five-mile walk and the sacrifice of his return ticket; Hillingdon being on another line. Lesbia made but faint demur; she was loth to leave Jeannie.

Arrived at Stanton Mere, Auburn found the Rectory deserted. M. le curé was taking a wedding for a brother parson: M. Roden had vanished the day before, Aline knew not whither: Mademoiselle and M. Caron were gone for a pique-nique with Mlle. Tréveur. But stay, added Aline, Mademoiselle had left a billet for Monsieur if he should come.

And after some searching she produced a line from Dodo.

“MY DEAR CHARLES,—We are gone to Cæsar's Camp. There is some cold beef on the table if you are hungry: if not, we have sandwiches for four.”
D. C.”

Auburn decided in favor of the sandwiches, and struck off across the Plain for Cæsar's Camp. It was a lonely spot, and wild enough in winter, but lovely in the high summer weather: a fortification of thymy turf encircling a shallow dew-pond which glassed the blue of the unclouded sky. From a great way off he saw them gathered on the

western side of that green rampart, under the shade of a solitary oak. The wind was blowing over the heath, wild and sweet, but cool as a wind at sea: a broad high tone that is never heard in cities, a shrill monotonous chant that had gone singing on, year in, year out, unbroken and unperturbed, over the leagues of the upland grass and heather. There was exhilaration in it, and sadness: it had chanted the requiem of the last sacrifice offered on the dread altar of the Plain, it would murmur the same merry tune when those who now listened to it had crumbled away into dust. To Auburn, in the pride of his keen vitality, its cry was a challenge. Let the dead bury their dead!

Fey, Caron thought, was the word for him, as he came across the turf bareheaded, with the afternoon sunlight striking down upon his chestnut hair and dark, merry eyes.

"Caron," he said, "I've proved nothing. I've been ignominiously kicked out of my paternal home with a flea in my ear. But I'm going to marry Dodo all the same."

He threw himself down on the grass and dropped a packet on Dodo's knee, while Caron shrugged his shoulders as one who disowns responsibility, and Grace dived into the hamper. Caron's insouciance and the keen goodwill of Grace soothed the wanderer, each in its way. They belonged to the Plain—how far unlike the heavy, choking woods of Auburn! And Dodo? Dodo served admirably to hang jewels on. Her hair was the sunlight, her eyes the blue sky, while the green of the turf and the hazy whiteness of the hills were crystallized in her pearl collar, with its fringe of trembling emeralds. To what depth they loved each other he cared as little as he knew: content to play at extravagant adoration, while she remained gay, amiable, and mocking. No tragic airs, in heaven's name! Human existence is a small thing, said the wind: dust in the balance, chaff on the threshing-floor of nature.

Dodo and Caron were pledged to dine with the Trevors; the invitation was extended to Auburn and towards seven

o'clock they all turned in at the gates of Trevor Hall, an old brick manor-house lying away from the road among orchards and fir groves. As they drew near they caught sight of a cluster of folk gathered on the broad steps before the porch. "Visitors—what a nuisance!" said Grace. "Can you see who it is, Car?"

"Those on the steps are Sir George and Lady Trevor," Caron answered, screwing up his dark eyes. "I know my lady by her sun-bonnet. The third looks uncommonly like Roden——"

"It is Roden, I believe," said Auburn in a perplexed voice, "but who the dickens has he got with him?"

"A tall, dark fellow whom I don't know."

"Do you know him, Charles?"

"It looks like—but it can't be——"

"Like *whom*?"

"Like, oh, it's absurd—sorry, dear child! Like Roland Carew."

Caron sent his voice up the avenue. "What's the matter?—is anything wrong?"

There was no reply, and a few moments later they met the group face to face: Sir George and Lady Trevor, Mr. Carminow, Bernard, Roden, and Roland Carew. Their constraint was so plain and so odd that even Grace was frightened.

Auburn went straight to Roland. "Is anything wrong with Violet?"

"Are you mad? I came to help you to get out of the country."

The answer was so remote from Auburn's wildest conception that it fairly took his breath away. The word fell to Dodo.

"Father! Roden!" she said, "for pity's sake tell us what has happened! For we have, none of us, the very faintest idea."

"I am afraid Charles knows only too well, my darling,"

said Mr. Carminow, his voice shaking so that he could hardly speak plain.

"Do you know, Charles?"

"Not from Adam," said Auburn, shrugging his shoulders; "some *malentendu*, probably, which would be dispelled if anybody had the courage to open his lips."

"Grace," this was Lady Trevor to her daughter, "go up to your room."

"Yes," said Sir George with a touch of his magisterial manner, "it's impossible to discuss the affair in the presence of ladies. Go, my dear, to your room: and I'm sure Mr. Carminow will agree with me that Dodo had better run away too."

Lady Trevor pulled Grace by the arm. "Do come, dear! you hear what papa says."

"I will if Dodo does."

"I?" said Dodo. "Oh, Lady Trevor! would you, if it were Sir George?"

"My dear, don't say such things!" said Lady Trevor hastily. Her tone startled Dodo more than anything that had gone before.

"Why, what has he done?"

"Nothing," averred Auburn, answering Dodo, but looking at Roland.

"Hypocrite!" said Bernard, drawing all eyes to himself by his tone. "If nobody else has got the pluck to speak, I will. It's in all the evening papers, so it can't long be kept quiet. Sir Charles Auburn was murdered last night, or early this morning, under circumstances which leave no doubt who did it."

"Murdered!" said Auburn, turning as white as a sheet.

"Oh, Charles!" said Dodo, slipping her fingers into his hand, "it was not you."

It was not, indeed; but for the first moment he had felt as if it were. He had so heartily longed to do justice on his father that it seemed as if it must have been his wish

that had done the work. Dodo's words—they were not a question—recalled his wits.

"Murdered? Last night? Impossible!"

"Oh yes," Bernard answered with his quiet sneer, "impossible and improbable too, if you like. Keep your story to yourself: I for one wouldn't hesitate to swear to an inconsistency at the trial."

"Bernard," said Mr. Carminow in horror, "think of your sister!"

"But I was with him till eleven o'clock!" said Auburn.

"Take care!" said Sir George quickly. "Bernard is quite right, Mr. Auburn—though, considering what provocation you received, I cannot say I like his tone."

"But do you mean that you think I did it?" asked Auburn. No one answered. "Roland! do *you* think I did it?" Roland's heavy eyes fell. Auburn walked straight up to him and seized his hand. "Answer me."

"Don't—oh, don't, Auburn."

"Don't what?"

"What is the good of this? We know you did it. Own the truth: it would be more manly. It breaks my heart to see you pretending."

Auburn dropped his hands and stepped back with a look of painful surprise. "I should have thought——" he began, and broke off. "But—*murdered!* Is he dead, then?"

"Dead enough, as you very well know. It's no good denying it," said Bernard. "You're a capital actor, and it wasn't a bad plan to sneak off like that from Hillingdon; but unluckily, you see, Roden had let out that you were down there, and once that fact was known it was all as clear as daylight. You reckoned, I suppose, on not being recognized at Riversley station?"

"Oh, Bernard, hold your tongue!" said Roden. "Go—leave us alone if you can't be quiet: no one wants you here."

Roden was deadly pale, paler than Roland Carew; unlike Roland Carew, he did not look as though he had shed tears, but he looked, Auburn thought, as though he had received an awful shock. His burst of nervous anger was in itself a sign of something very wrong. But he collected himself and went on more quietly.

"It really is true, Auburn. Sir Charles was murdered last night or early this morning—between twelve and one, the doctor says. He was struck on the head with a stick, and killed on the spot. I was breakfasting with Mr. Carew when we heard the news from the postman. Thanks to my inquiries at the station, they all know you were down there. The boy who picked up your cane on the platform has identified the one that was found on the floor near the body. The whole countryside is ringing with it; they're all very sorry for you, but they take for granted you're guilty."

"Yon don't?"

"I? no, I don't."

"You're fond of minorities," was Auburn's dry comment.

For there was not one of the other men who believed him. Sir George was full of grave pity: Mr. Carminow was turned into an old man by the shock: Bernard was cynically triumphant, Caron aghast. Misery and shame were written upon Roland's fine, haggard features. In most cases, the friends of an accused man will incontinently swear him innocent because their minds cannot take in the idea that he may be guilty. Such things don't happen outside the newspapers, or at all events they don't happen to people in one's own set. But in Auburn's case there was no such feeling of surprise. Between Sir Charles' scandalous reputation and his son's notoriously hot temper it seemed only too likely that mischief might have come about, and many minds would have leaped to a suspicion with far less evidence to go on.

Clear-eyed Grace had her arm locked round Dodo's waist.

"Idiots!" she cried, undutifully including in this category her father and mother, "can't you see he's speaking the truth?"

"I would give my right hand to believe it, Miss Trevor," said Roland, "but I can't. Don't kindle hopes in that poor girl, which can never be realized."

"Let me think," said Auburn. He put his hand up to his head as if he felt dazed; and so he did. "Do you say, Roland, that you came up here to get me out of the country? Am I in danger, then?"

"There's a warrant out against you."

"Which you signed, I suppose?"

"No," said Roland simply, "I wasn't asked. I think they knew about us."

"A warrant out against me!" repeated Auburn. Afterwards he was sorry to have made Roland wince, but at the time he did not think twice of it. "But you are not going to tell me that I'm in actual danger of arrest?"

"How can I say? Before ten o'clock this morning they knew you had gone from Lesbia's to Hillingdon."

"Nine hours ago. Grant them ordinary skill in picking up a trail, and, by Jove! I may sleep in jail to-night."

"It is possible. They will wire to the nearest police station—Amesbury, Sir George Trevor tells me—to send over a man to look for you."

"Do they allow bail?"

"Not in a—not in these cases."

"Not in a murder case, do you mean?" said Auburn, his lip curling. "Well, it is a devilish awkward situation—beg your pardon, Lady Trevor. When did you come, Roland?"

"Before two o'clock. You might have got clean away by this time. I telegraphed to Paterson to have the yacht ready to sail at a moment's notice——"

"You're a pretty magistrate!" Auburn exclaimed. "Why, man, you must be out of your senses! Do you

know what you'd get, for compounding a felony and defrauding the ends of justice? And where did you propose that I should go to—Callao? Thanks, I'd rather stand my trial! They can't hang me, I should think." He felt, rather than saw, the shiver that went over them all. "Oh, apparently you think they can! Good God! what sort of a net is this I've got into? I might have known he would not let me go so easily——"

"Who's this coming up the avenue?" said Dodo.

"Oh, Auburn—Auburn, old man!" cried out Carew.

Involuntarily, he made a movement to throw himself between Auburn and the stranger: a big, quiet man in the sober dress of a sergeant of police. Caron, who had never taken his artist's eyes from Auburn's face since the beginning of the scene, read in it the rush of a dozen sensations—pride, anger, dread, the physical instinct of flight, amid all the unconquerable desire to laugh. But the ruling principle was a noble kind of pride. Auburn put his arm round Dodo and she leaned against him, with no more regard of onlookers than if they had been in a desert. They had so few moments for such a long farewell.

"My darling, I must go."

"To prison?"

"If it were to death, you wouldn't have me cut and run?"

"No: you're innocent."

Auburn's next words, murmured with bent head, were inaudible, but all heard Dodo's reply and remembered it.

"Is this love or loyalty you're giving me?"

"Love and loyalty, through this world and the next."

The policeman came up, and Auburn released Dodo, and made Roland move aside. The man in blue was civil, deprecating, not unsympathetic, but professionally wide-awake: he stepped up to Auburn, touching his cap impartially to him and to the rest of the group, with some of whom he was, of course, familiar.

"Beg pardon, sir—Mr. Auburn?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry to say, sir, it's my painful duty to arrest you——"

"You have a warrant? Don't read it here," said Auburn quickly. "I'll come with you."

"Very good, sir."

He stood expectant. Auburn looked round at his friends, and again had to crush down that wild desire to laugh. "There isn't much time for farewells, is there?" he said. "Well, goodbye, all of you." No one answered, and he dropped his hand on Roland's shoulder. "'Bye, Roland—give my love to Violet. I shall see some of you again, I dare say."

Not one of them could find courage to reply, and he left them without another word, baring his head to the ladies. They watched him go down the avenue with his easy, swinging tread, beside the trim soldierly figure in blue. He did not look back.

XIV.

AMONG the many strange characteristics of human nature, not the least strange is the rapidity with which it grows used to the unusual. Twenty-four hours earlier, if any one had told Dodo what was coming, she would have refused to believe that such a thing could happen, or that, if it did happen, it could do less than turn her whole life upside down. It had happened: it seemed already to have happened years ago, to be as familiar as a twice-told tale: and the course of her duties, on the evening of Auburn's arrest, flowed on as smoothly as if it had never happened at all.

Not so in the village, for that was teeming with excitement. Fell, the blacksmith's son, bicycling home from Amesbury with a copy of the *North Wilts Evening Star* doubled up in his pocket, dropped in at the Fox and Hounds to spread the tidings of the Auburn murder, and was met with the news that "that there young feller oop t' Carminows" had been seen driving out of Stanton Mere in a dogcart in the custody of a sergeant of police. Country districts are dry grass, easily set aflame. When Caron crossed the Market Square to catch the evening post, he was infuriated to find that heads popped out of every doorway, and a buzz of talk sprang up behind him as he passed.

But at the Vicarage all was quiet enough. Roland Carew, who had been put into Auburn's empty room for the night, tramped up and down the terrace with his pipe in his mouth, dark, silent, brooding. Caron, told off to look after him, lounged with his books and his cigars in a long chair not far from the study window, through which now and

then a phrase floating out moved him to a sour grin. Within, Roden and Bernard were wrestling for possession of Mr. Carminow's soul, torn in twain between worldly and unworldly wisdom. Meanwhile Dodo, lint-white and completely self-absorbed, had gone to the kitchen to help Aline get ready the supper, and was deviling cold chicken for Roland's benefit with the placidity of a machine.

Towards eight o'clock they were all startled by a loud ring at the bell. It turned out to be Piers Comfrey, Auburn's valet, ridden over from Amesbury to ask what was wrong. He would not come in, and Roden went out and spoke to him at the door. The man was desperately agitated: he had been Auburn's servant for thirteen years, and had not only read the news in the papers, but also seen his master being driven through Amesbury High Street under escort of the police. He had run after the dogcart, and was able to inform Roden that Auburn had been packed off that same evening to Hillingdon, alone with his escort in a reserved compartment. Roden in exchange told all that he knew, and offered the faithful servant a night's lodging: but this was declined. "I could not catch the early train to Hillingdon, sir, if I stayed here," Piers replied simply.

He left before eight next morning, and was followed a couple of hours later by a party consisting of Roland Carew and Roden and Dodo Carminow. Mr. Carminow's opposition, undermined by Roden's lucid common sense, gave way altogether before Dodo's white composure. He agreed with Bernard that Dodo ought to be kept out of an ugly business, and with Roden that it was her place to stand by Auburn in trouble: but his decision was facilitated when he found that Dodo took consent for granted, and that he dared not undeceive her.

"Who will go with you?" he asked. "I can't, until I have a man for Sunday."

Dodo answered, "Roden."

"And where will you stay?" inquired Mr. Carminow. "You know there is not much money going, my dear."

"Mr. Carew says he'll put us up at Ferndean. That won't cost anything except railway fares, and tipping the servants."

"God bless you, my darling," said Mr. Carminow, kissing her. "Dodo, my poor little girl, this is hard for you."

Dodo could not answer for the contraction of her throat. She slipped from the room and went upstairs to pack her modest portmanteau, wondering, as she took her skirts down from their pegs, how long it would be before she hung them up there again, and what would then be her outlook upon life. She could not talk, she could not think, she could not pray; but when her box was packed, and all had been said that could be said to Aline in the way of directions, she sat down to go on with Bernard's shirts.

It was a relief to be out of the humming gossip of Stanton Mere, and alone with men who did not watch her. Grace Trevor saw her off, and hugged her on the platform. Grace would have given much to come too. She had asked leave, but Sir George had peremptorily forbidden it, and Grace was too sensible to rebel, knowing that in such a case the rebellion of the daughter is visited on the head of the friend. She reserved to herself the right to have her own way later.

Dodo had not wished to go to Ferndean at first, but had given way before the advantages of the plan; for Roland was personally acquainted with the governor of Hillingdon Prison, and as guests of a J.P. they would be sure of a civility which might or might not be extended to strangers lodging at an inn. Mr. Carminow added that Mrs. Carew would be a chaperon for Dodo, but here Dodo shook her head: she did not expect to like Violet, and in fact took for granted that it was she who had poisoned Roland's thoughts of Auburn. Dodo had not yet learned to follow the workings of that mind, so prone to believe evil, so eager to

believe good, so womanly tender and withal puritanically stern. It was during the long hours of that interminable journey that Dodo first grew to know Roland Carew: not by speech, for they barely exchanged a syllable, but by patient study of the dark, averted face.

As they came into Riversley station she saw those dark eyes suddenly light up. With a word of apology, he sprang out before the train stopped and went to meet Violet, who came forward looking very grave and yet very French in her grey skirt checked with heliotrope and heliotrope slip, with a cluster of living violets pinned to the lapel of her coat.

"So they've arrested him?" she said, taking Roland's hand. "Weren't you in time?"

"No: but he wouldn't have gone in any case. Violet, he swears he's innocent!"

An untranslatable shade of expression flitted over Violet's face. "Does he? Do you believe him?"

Roland shook his head.

"Oh."

"I've brought Miss Carminow back, and her brother. I said we'd put them up."

"Have you? Oh, I'm so glad," said Violet.

It was quite untrue, as Mrs. Carew's remarks generally were when she described her own feelings. Her first thought had been, "Heavens, I shall have to pet her!" But she changed her opinion when Dodo came forward with her pale, alert face and brilliant eyes. Violet Carew was an habitual student of character, silent, profound, decisive: if she had ever thought about herself she must have smiled, now and then, at the boldness of her own judgments. She was as sure of Dodo in that first glance as she had been, from the first, of Auburn.

A car was waiting, and they were soon at Ferndean. It was a roomy, old-fashioned house, the furniture dark with age, the carpets worn, the pale, flowered chintzes shabby

from much sunlight. Dodo was given the Lilac Room, which overlooked the sunset and the garden, and was so big that an enormous four-post bedstead was dwarfed with all its lilac hangings into insignificance: she had never slept in such a big room in her life. She changed her dress before she went down to dinner, and washed off the dust, and coiled up her fair hair into a classic knot, surprised to find as she did so that she cared not a straw for her own appearance, and could not pretend to care, though she rated herself for what must, surely, be affectation? But no; the greater part of her thoughts were from home, and what was left was but just light enough to walk by.

Afterwards, looking back, Dodo was inclined to give the palm for utter dreariness to that first day after the arrest. Worse pain came later, but never again such weary blankness. After dinner, Mr. Maine, Auburn's solicitor, came and was closeted for an hour with Roland and Roden in the library, while Dodo sat in the drawing-room with Mrs. Carew, the latter sewing at a drawn-thread cloth, her guest buried in photograph albums as a defense against having to make conversation. Violet raised her eyes now and then to steal a quiet glance at Miss Carminow: she would have liked to tell her to put the books away and go to bed, but guessed that Dodo would dislike the implication of sympathetic tact. Meantime Dodo only longed to be at home, and to go and peel potatoes, or sweep out a room, and so quiet her mind by the exhaustion of her body: the restless fatigue of her journey and of a sleepless night contributing to sink her spirits to zero.

Maine went at half-past nine, and the men came into the drawing-room, but there was nothing to be got out of them. Roland went to the piano and began to play: Roden, unconcealably depressed and tired, dropped into an armchair and tried to talk embroidery with Violet with less than his usual ease.

At last it was night. At ten o'clock Roland read prayers,

an institution unknown, strange to say, at the Vicarage, for Mr. Carminow's incurably whimsical taste rebelled at the thought of praying in an atmosphere of fried ham: but in the long drawing-room at Ferndean there was nothing to offend, and Dodo had her first moment's ease in that brief and simple service. Her chair was near to Roden's, so that when they knelt she could see his face in profile, and she was struck by its expression: so calm, so spiritual, so remote. His was that peace which the world cannot give.

A moment later Roland, with an involuntary vibration in his deep, even voice, came upon the Litanical prayer for all prisoners and captives: and Dodo saw Roden shrink and wince with a sudden sharp spasm, as if in physical pain, and hide his face in his hands. The thought crossed her mind, "He might well look like that if he had done it himself." The impression was only transitory, but it was strong, and recurred later.

Some time after, when Dodo had gone up to bed, Roden came to her room. He found her sitting by the open window in the dark, her fair hair faintly illuminated by the starshine. "Is that you, Roddy? I thought you'd come."

"What have you got on? You'll catch cold."

"I'm perfectly warm."

Roden crossed to her side and stood looking out into the glimmering darkness, over the moist lawns of Ferndean and its groves of oak and ash. "Not much like the Plain, is it?" he said.

"No. What did Mr. Maine say?"

"The inquest is to be to-morrow, at the Crown Inn at Hillingdon. He thinks there is not much doubt that the verdict will go against Auburn, but of course that counts for absolutely nothing. After that the case will have to go before the magistrates, and then before the Grand Jury, either of whom may throw it out: we shall have got our evidence together by that time."

"And if they don't?"

"It will go to the Assizes in October."

"And that will be final. Has he seen Charles yet?"

"For half an hour, this afternoon. He is comfortably lodged—carpet, furniture, pen and ink, books and all that: gets his meals from the hotel. Maine says he's very cool over it."

"What does Mr. Maine think of Charles' own story?"

Roden fidgeted under this unsparing cross-examination. "He didn't say."

"What does Charles say? I don't really know what his version is, you know. We were out on the moors when he came back, and Grace and Car were there. I haven't seen him alone since before he went to see Lesbia."

"Well, he doesn't seem to have been very communicative." Try as he would, Roden could not keep the note of depression out of his voice. "He says he saw Sir Charles and had a talk with him, and was out of the house again by eleven: but he doesn't seem to have gone to Lesbia till some hours later, which is unlucky. I don't exactly understand what he did with himself between whiles."

"Does Mr. Maine believe him innocent?"

"Of course he does!"

"Did he say so?"

"Not in so many words. He—he implied it."

"Oh!" said Dodo. She was silent a moment, looking out of the window.

"Look, Roddy. Do you see that light over there between the trees, a little lower down?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Auburn. They keep a lamp burning all night in the room where Sir Charles is lying."

"Who told you that, Dodo?"

"The maid who brought up my hot water. I asked her if one could see the house from here."

"Horrible!" said Roden, shuddering. "Why do you think of such morbid things?"

"I don't know. I should like to see Sir Charles," said Dodo slowly. "I should like to propitiate him. If I were a heathen, I'd set up a shrine and burn incense and offer flowers. Roddy, this thing is going wrong: I am sure of it."

"That is utter nonsense, my child."

"No, it's not. I've been thinking over all the evidence. It is very heavy. I don't see much chance of escape, unless they find the real murderer."

"The real murderer!"

"Why, he can't have done it himself, you know! If it had been a revolver shot or a knife-wound—but nobody can cut his own head open with a walking stick. It was not a bruise: it was a wound. There was blood on the silver handle—My dear Roden!"

"You're cooler than I am," said Roden, wiping his forehead. "Are you insensitive as you pretend to be?"

"I'm not pretending at all," said Dodo. "What is there so very dreadful in what I said? It's you who are morbid: you always do take things queerly. I don't know," she added a moment later: "I don't think I do feel quite natural, but I can't help it. I would be if I could. Is it insensitive not to care at all about Sir Charles—not to feel any pity or regret? I can't. I feel as if something evil were out of the way. Not quite out of the way, either: I shall be glad when he's buried."

"Why?"

"Oh, to be rid of him. I feel as if he were still somewhere near—hovering round his own body till it's put under the earth—waiting to see how things will go. I was thinking, before you came in, that if that lamp is burning by his bed he must be able to look straight across to this window. He must have been a man of great power—the sort that don't die easily. I shouldn't be surprised if he came to the window and looked in."

"I hope not," said Roden. "You won't mind my running away, if he does?"

"Not at all. It would be natural for you to be frightened, because to you he would be just an ordinary ghost."

"What would he be to you?"

"I should ask him whether he did altogether hate Charles, or whether there was not a grain or so of disappointed love at the bottom of it."

"That is a wonderfully acute thing to say," Roden observed after a pause, "though the form in which you say it is desperate nonsense. What makes you say it?"

"Charles himself. He painted Sir Charles in such lurid colors. No man could be so bad, I think, as he believed Sir Charles to be. I imagine Sir Charles was more of a brute—more stupid, that is—and less of a Mephistopheles."

"Yet Auburn's a shrewd judge of character."

"Yes: but he's very proud."

"That looks suspiciously like a *non sequitur*: but I don't pretend to follow you."

"It's only a short cut," said Dodo, "down a way you've never been taken."

"You're confoundedly fond of that fellow, Dodo."

"Yes."

"I wish to heaven——" said Roden, and broke off, frowning. He might as well have gone on, for Dodo dotted his i's for him.

"You wish I'd never seen him? Ah! you too think things will go badly."

Roden was mute, regretting his slip. "Don't pretend," said Dodo with a touch of scorn, "or rather don't try to pretend, for you can't do it—not with me. Besides, I'd far rather face it. If they don't find the real murderer, they will hang Charles."

"They may condemn him: if they do, we shall petition."

"For a reprieve—to a life sentence."

"Why, yes," said Roden. "I don't deny that it looks black enough either way."

"Either a life sentence, or else—oh, let me say it just

once, Roden! I may see it less if I've said it once—some time this autumn, a group in the jail yard, the gallows, the chaplain, three or four warders, the jail governor, and Charles in the middle with a cord round his neck: then some one pulls a bolt, the trapdoor falls, and you hang there for two or three minutes before the struggling ceases. . . . And that is real: it isn't morbid imagination: it may actually happen. And I shall read the notice of it in the newspapers, and live on, and on, and on . . ."

She turned and looked out into the night. Roden leaned against the window-frame with his eyes shut and his hands in his pockets. He could better have coped with the wildest passion than with this intensely quiet realism. He, too, had a keen imagination, but it had long been his way to curb it, to look past spectres towards heaven—not, as Dodo dared, to look them in the face and look them down.

"You think too much of life and death, Dodo."

She raised her head, but did not reply.

"Death is not what you think. You speak as if it were an end, but it's only a beginning. What does it signify what door you go by, to leave earth for heaven?"

After that they were long silent, Roden incapable of another word: he had summarized his creed for Dodo's benefit, but could not expatiate upon it. At last Dodo turned from the darkness towards him; she put her arm round his neck and pulled him down for a kiss.

"Dear Roddy," she said, "oh, you are good! Go away, go to bed: I'm going to bed myself. You've done me heaps of good. I *have* been feeling so queer all day: it has all been one deadly dream. One's nerves do play one tricks. Nothing ever could be so bad as what I've been seeing to-day." She shivered, and drew down the blind. "Dear darling! and then you hear girls say they can't get on with their brothers. I don't know, though: on second thoughts, there's Bernard. What have I got my hair loose for?" She seized it, and in a moment had plaited it up into her

usual pigtails. "Go to bed, old boy: you look as white as anything!"

"Your conversation, my child, is not of that soothing character——"

"It has soothed me, anyhow, which is the main point. I should hope you would rather I was soothed than you were?"

She lit a candle, and by its flames Roden saw that it was the old Dodo who confronted him, able to put a good face on her troubles and even to jest over them. He himself was not the old Roden: but Dodo, keen as her eyes were, did not distinguish that change.

"Good-night, dear darling," she said, "bless you for an angel! Let us all devote our energies henceforward to finding out the man who really did do it."

"By all means," said Roden. "I'm with you, heart and soul. He deserves no sympathy if he can stand by and see an innocent man suffer when a word might save him."

XV.

THE Assize Court at Hillingdon stood on the rise of a hill at the end of the town: a large, square, modern edifice, fronted with the pillars and architrave of a Grecian temple, but tailing off at the back into an anomalous collection of out-buildings. Between the great iron gates a flight of steps led into a square hall guarded by police, whence doors opened into different courts; and in one of these—that reserved for Grand Jury cases—was proceeding, on a hot evening early in October, the last scene of the Auburn trial.

The Court was a large, light, cheerful room with a glass roof and cream-colored walls, the floor cut up into oddly-shaped compartments not unlike old-fashioned square pews, the back occupied by rows upon rows of hard, narrow forms one above another. Galleries and benches alike being packed with a dense mass of spectators, and every window shut to suit a whim of the judge, the atmosphere was like that of the pit.

The judge was Mr. Justice Dymock. He sat facing the spectators in a large leather armchair on a raised platform surmounted by the royal arms. On his right sat the High Sheriff, a tall, good-looking personage in scarlet and gold: on his left, the black figure of the chaplain: and, beyond these, various dignitaries of the neighborhood: while in the well of the Court immediately below sat the Clerk of Assize, small and uneasy-looking, who divided his attention between his papers and his wig. It did not fit, and he was constrained more than once to take it off and put it on again.

On the right, the witness-box, now empty: on the left the

jury, a curious mixture of types and classes, respectable tradesmen from Hillingdon rubbing shoulders with Colonel Playfair of the Grange, or Mr. Farquhar, ex-M.P. for North Hants. Intellectual, cunning, stupid: conscientious, cowardly, frivolous: sympathetic, vindictive, bored,—they represented every phase of emotion, and it was hard to say which class of qualities predominated.

Thanks to Roland Carew's position, a bench was reserved in the front row of spectators for the friends of the accused: Mrs. Carew and Miss Carminow together, Roden beyond Dodo, Roland between his wife and the prisoner. They had figured on the front page of the *Daily Illustrated*, those four, in a sketch of "The Assize Court at Hillingdon," fringed with a string of hurried profiles—Violet a blur, Roland scowling, Roden inane to a degree, Dodo as delicately sweet as the medium permitted: and, "it certainly can do no harm," said old Maine, as he held the print to his nose.

Jimmy Maine was an old fox, the last of three generations of lawyers, who had acted as legal advisers to as many heads of the house of Auburn. Business apart, he had a personal liking for his present client, and was inwardly cursing Auburn's stiff-necked folly. By hook or by crook Jimmy Maine had intended to get Dodo into the witness-box, but a word let fall chanceably before Auburn had spoiled the plan, bringing down upon him commands point-blank that Dodo should not be dragged into the mire. So, Dodo sat with the audience, and Jimmy Maine in the stifling well of the Court wiped his bald head with a green silk handkerchief and grumbled in undertones: for the trial was all but over, and he had a grave doubt which way it would go.

So far, it had all gone exactly as he had expected. There had been no surprises, and few dramatic moments. It was all stale, a twice-told tale—a mere repetition of what had been said at the inquest and again before the magistrates.

The police had deposed to the finding of the body of Sir Charles with the blood-stained stick lying hard by: the medical evidence had fixed the time of death within an hour or so. No, it could not have been suicide, said Dr. Upton: the nature of the wound absolutely precluded the idea. The deceased had been struck on the temple and probably killed on the spot. The weapon produced was exactly what might have been expected to cause such a wound. Then came the testimony of the lad at the station, who identified Auburn as the passenger of the previous evening, and the cane as the one he had picked up.

Next came Davis, a horribly damaging witness—the more so for his obvious reluctance, which had produced one of the liveliest moments of the inquest, when the prisoner, in defiance of decorum, blazed out into an indignant, “*Will you tell the truth, you old scamp?*” Thus adjured, Davis had told the truth, and a pretty tale it was for the prisoner! He knew nothing and never would have known anything of Auburn’s presence on the night of the murder, had it not been for the ill-starred visit of Roland and Roden: but scarcely were they gone when it occurred to him that Auburn might have repaired straight to the window, and he crept to the dining-room door to listen. Bit by bit they dragged from him what he had overheard—the low voices, the coldly civil tones, the lash of Auburn’s irony, the bludgeon-coarse humor of Sir Charles:

“You’re not much like me, my boy.”

“I’m sorry to hear it.”

“Gad, if your mother had been a prettier woman, I should have thought. . . .”

Through the mask of Hampshire idiom the dead voice emerged with a plainness which produced a murmur scarcely to be quelled by the usher’s iterated mechanical cry of “*Silence!*” Those were the last words caught by Davis, for Hayter the second footman (Sir Charles lived in style) had come upon him unexpectedly, forcing him for

shame to quit his station; and Hayter was called to corroborate the tale, and to testify that he had found Davis "a-shaking all hover, with 'is ear glued to the keyhole."

Then came Lesbia, a noble figure with burning eyes, in her decent black dress and smoothly braided hair. Lesbia in a mute, storm-driven fury, aweing the court with her grand gestures and strange tongue. Yes, Mr. Charles had come to her that night. Yes, she had taken him in and he had slept under her roof. (Nothing would induce her to speak of him by any other name.) Agitated? No; calm enough; and wet through, "but not with blood," said Lesbia in her strange vibrant voice: "'twas nothing worse than God's own dew, where he'd been out in the fog." No, he had not talked much with her: he had told her that he came from Sir Charles, and that they quarrelled—inflexibly truthful and sworn to tell the whole truth, Lesbia made this avowal as one at the stake—but he was calm enough: no sign of painful dread: "he slept like a babe," said Lesbia, making the judge smile in spite of himself: "I kissed him in his sleep." Pressed to account for Auburn's action next day in walking five miles to return, at the price of his ticket, by a different line, she scored a point for the defense. Did they think Mr. Charles would value ten shillings or five miles above her convenience? He had enjoined no secrecy upon her: he had gone off waving his hand, said Lesbia, "bonny and cool—a rare figure of a murderer." No, she had not in so many words asked him to go, but she had as good as asked him—she had let him know that she was going, and that she could ill arrange for it, "and do you think," said angry Lesbia, "any woman would have to ask him plainer than that?" And so, bearing herself in hand, she left the box to make way for an agitated Hillingdon chemist, who proved that Auburn had actually applied to him before eight o'clock to get the tabloids made up in time to catch the local post.

Last of all had came the examination and cross-exam-

ination of the prisoner, when Auburn, calm to a fault, gave his version of the doings of that strange midsummer night. Bastow, K.C., had characterized that version as extraordinary: and so it was, in its cold frankness. Jimmy Maine was inured to dramatic effects, but even he had been startled by what struck him at first as an affected and unseemly piece of cynicism.

"Did you come to words with Sir Charles?"

"Yes, we had a row."

"Oh, you had a row! Upon what subject?"

"I decline to say."

"You have heard the evidence of the witness Davis. I put it to you that Sir Charles used insulting language with regard to his late wife?"

"That is quite true."

"Sir Charles insulted your mother, and you quarrelled with him. Had you your stick in your hand at the time?"

"No, I had thrown it down on the table."

"It was within reach, however?"

"Oh yes."

"When Sir Charles insulted your mother, what did you do?"

"I left the house."

"By the same way as you had come in?"

"Practically the same. I had closed the window behind me: the hasp caught, and I smashed the glass to get away."

"You could not stay to turn the handle?"

"No, I was too keen to be out of it."

"Nor to pick up your hat and stick?"

Auburn shrugged his shoulders. "I forgot them."

"You must have been in a very extraordinary frame of mind. Why were you in such a hurry?"

"Because I could not have kept my hands off Sir Charles ten seconds longer."

Such words could not fail to produce a sensation, and some moments passed ere quiet was restored. But Jimmy

Maine, catching the eye of the judge, would have given much to know what old Dymock made of them.

At present the attention of the Court was fixed upon the learned and eloquent counsel for the defense. He was worth watching, indeed: a big handsome man, with a shrewd dark eye and a tongue of silver. He laid stress upon the improbability of the case: a young man of the prisoner's class would not strike an old man, least of all one whom by every tie of blood and decency he was bound to respect. A quarrel might easily come about, but not a cowardly blow. His learned brother had characterized the prisoner's defense as extraordinary. He quite agreed with him. It was extraordinarily frank and straightforward. The prisoner had not tried to suppress what might be thought likely to tell against him. Mr. Riccardo would remind the jury that for the details of the quarrel they were, in the fragmentary state of the evidence of the butler Davis, chiefly indebted to the prisoner himself. Did such frankness look like guilt? Did it not rather suggest conscious innocence, which has no fear of the truth? They had heard the testimony of Mrs. Burnet. Was it credible that a man fresh from a brutal murder should be able to sleep like a child?

Again, the evidence was purely circumstantial. There was no direct proof whatever: nothing but a tissue of surmises. The utmost that could be proved against the prisoner was that he *might* have committed the crime: but it had by no means been proved impossible that some unknown enemy of Sir Charles, who, it could not be doubted, had made such enemies——" (here he was pulled up smartly by his learned brother, the judge confirming the objection: nevertheless, the hint had been got in, and was sure to tell with the jury)—"supposing, then, that Sir Charles had what men of the most scrupulous honor and unstained probity" (laughter) "were sometimes known to have—a personal enemy—why should not such a man have found his way in by the broken window and struck the fatal

blow? He need not remind the gentlemen of the jury that the onus of proof lay on the prosecution: and so long as a shadow of uncertainty existed the prisoner was entitled. . . .”

“Oh, I wish he’d have done!” Dodo whispered in Roden’s ear. “It’s cruelly trying for Charles.”

Auburn stood erect, fronting the judge, the sunlight striking down on his chestnut head. He had flatly refused to wear mourning for political reasons, and was dressed in grey. Placed between two warders, both tall and powerful men, he overtopped them both by an inch or so. His clear, brown skin, was a trifle the paler for his weeks in prison, but not much; sunburn ingrained in fifteen years of wandering does not wear off in a couple of months. It had been a sickening surprise to him when he recognized, in the galleries, face after face that he had known in town: men to whom he had played guest or host, women who had rarely been too deeply engaged to spare him a dance. He was cool enough, however, to deceive even Dodo. Had he betrayed a tithe of the shame and confusion which seized him—shy Englishman that he was at heart—when he first walked into that crowded Court, he would have quelled her courage altogether. But Auburn carried off the dishonors of the situation with grace.

At length the great Riccardo sat down, having earned his heavy fee by an address both emotional and reasonable, which did him the more credit because he was convinced of the prisoner’s guilt: and after his strong and silver accents rose the harsh elderly tones of the judge. Even Dodo, tired to apathy, listened now: for this, she knew, would go far to decide the verdict.

Knowledge of the law: insight into human nature: shrewd common sense, that delighted to strike through legal quibbles and tear down the cobwebs of sophistication spun by partial pleaders—these were the elements of Mr. Justice Dymock’s summing up. His rigor was tempered with

mercy—he would strain a point, if need were, for the prisoner rather than against him: but if it were possible he would strain no point—the facts must speak for themselves. If the jury believed the prisoner's statement, and were prepared to accept the theory of the defense that some person or persons unknown had entered the room after the prisoner left it, then they must find accordingly: but it was his duty to point out to them that there was no shadow of proof of this theory: rather, the weight of evidence was against it. What could have been the motive? Not robbery, for the silver plate on the table, the rings on the dead man's fingers, were left untouched. If revenge was the object, it was hard to believe that the avenger would have come unprovided with a weapon. But if they were not able to accept this theory, and found themselves forced to believe that put forward by the prosecution, then, again, it was their duty to find the prisoner guilty, without allowing themselves to be influenced by any considerations which affected, not the facts, but what he might call the sentiment of the case.

Auburn drew a long breath and straightened his shoulders: it would soon be over now! Tired of his cramped attitude—for he had been on his feet the greater part of the day—he dropped into the chair that had been set for him and crossed his knees. A buzz of talk sprang up all over the Court. The judge consulted his notes, and chatted in an undertone with the sheriff. Roden looked furtively at Dodo, and Violet Carew wondered whether any power on earth would induce her husband to go out for five minutes and get a glass of wine and a biscuit.

A stir in the jury created a momentary tension, but proved to be a false alarm. Uncertain on a point of law, they desired to be enlightened by the judge. Their difficulty was elucidated in a dozen wise, simple sentences, and the twelve heads—young and old, rich and poor, aristocrat and shopkeeper—were bowed together again over their verdict.

"I wish they would take Charles out," murmured Dodo. "It's awfully trying for him."

"I wish they would open a window," said Roden. "This place is deadly hot."

He put his hand to his forehead as he spoke, and Dodo gave him a moment's cursory observation. "Poor Roddy!" she said with a touch of compunction, "and you feel the heat so much. You look very seedy, old boy."

"I don't know that we any of us look particularly blooming," said Roden. "Auburn's the coolest of the lot."

"H'm," said Dodo, with an odd, meditative look. She was spared the need of an answer by Violet, who leaned past her to whisper to Roden, "Do, please, watch my husband: I'm nervous about him." Roland sat erect, impassive, sickly-white, his hands clenched on his knee: he looked ten years older for the last few weeks. But Roden gave him a pity as superficial as he had himself received from his sister.

"Those people, how they laugh!" said Dodo, shuddering, as a titter went round the crowded benches behind them. "Can it be much longer, Roddy?"

"No, dear."

"I thought the jury would leave the room to deliberate."

"Apparently they don't want to."

"If—if it goes wrong—Oh, Roddy! What's the matter?"

"Here it is, anyhow," said Roden, with lips so clenched that he could hardly speak. "Steady, Dodo! steady, for Auburn's sake!"

There was again a stir among the jury: not a point of law this time, but the end of the play. Auburn rose to his feet, still cool to the brink of hardihood. Roden seized Dodo's hand and crushed it, as the sheriff sat down and the judge picked up his spectacles.

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my lord."

Roden passed his arm round Dodo. It was not necessary. Tense as steel, no color in her face except the vivid blue of her eyes, she was lifted out of all weakness.

The judge turned to Auburn. "Have you anything to say, prisoner?"

"No," said Auburn mechanically: and, as he spoke, raised his head and looked keenly, with an altered purpose, into the face of the man who was about to condemn him. For the low tones betrayed emotion: the judge was only a man after all, with a man's heart to feel compassion, and uncertainty, and the dread cross of responsibility. "On second thoughts, there is something I should like to say. May I say it?"

"This is not the time to reopen any question of fact——"

"I am not going to, my lord. All I want is to thank those who have taken part in this trial for the frank and fair hearing they have given me. Yourself, my lord, it would be an impertinence to thank for absolute impartiality: but I should like to acknowledge my sense of the extreme fairness, and even generosity, with which I have been treated by the counsel for the prosecution. I own," continued Auburn, shaking back his head with a quick movement, touched with a kind of whimsical humor, "if I had had the trying of this case, I should have brought myself in guilty. No one could stand against such a weight of evidence. Chance—I accuse no one—chance has been too strong for me. But, since I'm innocent, it seems—to me, be it understood—probable that my innocence may some day come to light: and when that day does come you may like to remember, gentlemen, that I bore not the shadow of a grudge against any one of you."

Dymock listened unmoved: not a flicker of expression passed over the grim, wise face, over the eyes that never for one moment quitted the eyes of the prisoner. Low and stern came the answer of the judge.

"Charles Auburn, you are about to stand in the presence of your Maker, and no words of mine can make your situation more terrible than your own conscience must perceive it to be. You are an educated man: there is no need that I should enlarge upon the grievous nature of your crime. You say you forgive those who have sent you to your death. You yourself stand in need of forgiveness. Use what time remains to you in imploring the mercy of a Judge who knows the secrets of all hearts."

They gave him the black cap, and he set it on his head. Auburn moved a step forward, so that he stood alone, clear of the warders. With a mind clear and composed, and able to grasp every word, he followed that dread sentence to the end.

". . . . And that you be taken to the place whence you came and thence to a place of execution and there be hanged by the neck till you be dead: and may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

"Amen," said the chaplain in a shaken voice: and "Amen," said Auburn himself, and added under his breath, "So, it's over."

An officer touched his arm with a sharp, "This way, please." His tone had a new touch of authority, as of law dealing with the criminal; a touch of awe also, as befits man dealing with his fellow-man so soon to take leave of the world. In five minutes' time the next case was to be tried. The second warder unlocked the door of the dock and stepped down from it. Auburn turned to follow—swung round—and for the first time since the trial began bent his aching eyes on the faces dearest to him in the fast-departing world. He saw Violet touch Roden's sleeve, and Roden, himself white and drawn and old in suffering, make a swift movement to seize Roland Carew by the arm; and he saw Roland, without a cry, drop down before Roden could save him, in a dead faint on the ground. But apart from all, and nearer to him than all, he saw Dodo standing erect, her

face set like a white mask, but her eyes vividly blue, shining as if they had seen God with a passion that outwent dishonor and death: he saw her lips move, and read the troth he could not hear:

“Through this world and beyond it.”

XVI.

AFTER the trial Auburn was taken back to the county jail, but not to his old quarters. That night the fine weather, prolonged beyond its usual limits, broke up, and as he lay in his cramped cot, chafing under the eye of the warder on guard, he heard hour after hour the crying of wind and dash of rain against the high, barred window of the condemned cell.

Day came, desolate and stormy, but soft, one of those wild grey days of early autumn that set the blood tingling in young veins. It drove Auburn to pacing up and down. So many a time, in the years long ago, he had flung out of the grey University town, alone or with Roland Carew, to breast the rise of Madingley Hill—to tire out in a long country tramp the body that ached with excess of life. The old days haunted him. He shut his eyes and saw it all again: the wide Cambridge champaign, the grey wind blowing between the ring of far grey hills, the red leaves drifted by the roadside, the smell of fog and bare woodlands, and amid all that himself and Roland Carew, bare-headed, arm in arm, waking the quiet road with their high boyish voices and laughter.

The entrance of a second warder and a summons to quit his cell recalled him to present circumstances. Expecting an interview with the governor or the chaplain, he silently followed his escort to the visitors' room, to be met by Roland himself. "Hullo!" said Auburn. "I was just thinking of you. Do you remember the Madingley road?"

"The Madingley road?"

"The road up Madingley Hill, with the old windmill on

top looking like a moth that had been through a candle, and the short cut down through the woods to the village, and the inn where they gave you buttered toast and beer. Oh! spare me that funereal face, Roland. What's the good of it?"

"*Auburn!* for heaven's sake——"

"I know, I know," Auburn struck in, "'for heaven's sake be serious, Auburn!' All right, I'll be serious—I'll be anything you like! Say the word—what shall it be? Pious resignation? I haven't a grain of piety in me and don't feel resigned; but if you would like us to say the Lord's Prayer together I don't mind going down on my knees."

"Auburn, do remember——"

"Binns? Binns is deaf: aren't you, Binns? Besides, he's quite amiable. What the devil have you been doing with yourself—fasting in sackcloth and ashes? Come, bear up: don't be so hypersensitive! It's a quick death, after all."

"A reprieve——" faltered Roland, the words barely intelligible.

"Rot! You'll never do it. The judge has the casting vote, I know that much, and you'll get precious little change out of old Dymock. Where's the good of building castles in Spain?"

"Of course we shall petition——"

"Do by all means if it amuses you, but if I were Home Secretary you might whistle for a reprieve. Rank sentimentalism of the most vulgar type, that's what it will be: shopgirls and actors and dissenting parsons signing in their millions because I'm passably good-looking and have a handle to my name. Old Hardyng will put it behind the fire—your petition."

"God help us all!" said Roland. He covered his eyes with his hands: he had forgotten the warder's presence, as had Auburn himself. "If you—if they—if—if——"

"If I'm hanged—fire away."

"If this awful thing does happen, it will be the end of all things, for me. A God who strikes with such blind injustice is no God at all—or a devil."

"Yet your creed doesn't profess to be a system of temporal rewards and punishments."

"I can't stop my ears with formulæ. Oh, I'm wrong, I dare say; but, wrong or right, if you die it will all go to pieces."

"A circumstance which I should exceedingly regret," said Auburn with a low laugh. "Oh, be good, Roland! Where's the use of swearing? I've had a very lively time of it anyhow: not so long as could be wished, but eminently festive. If there is a God, I cry quits: I've had a run for my money."

"But death," said Roland, throwing himself down on the seat from which Auburn had risen: "but death!"

"Death, eh? Well, we've faced it for fun—can't you face it in earnest? I remember when you bagged your first tiger you gave him the *coup de grâce* on foot at close quarters out of sheer devilry: you were less nervous then."

"That was different: there was no dishonor attached to it."

"And I confess, old Roland, I shall not think myself dishonored."

"Ah, Auburn!" said Roland, sorrowfully, "and yet you mean to die with a lie on your lips?"

Auburn started: the unready color sprang to his face.

"True, I'd forgotten that," he said, after a long and noticeable pause.

He perched himself on the table, one hand in his pocket, the other thrown round Roland's neck. "Dear old fellow, I wish you wouldn't take it so hardly. What a boy it is, for all its six-and-thirty years! I should think never prisoner had a more loyal pal—loyal under difficulties too, by Jove!" he bit his lip to repress a smile. "But don't swear grace overboard, there's a dear lad! Play a waiting game. Clear

out of England as soon as it's over—I suppose I mustn't ask you to go before—clear out and take Violet with you, yachting, say: the sea's a tonic. You'll soon learn to see things in a proper light. I'm not the first, you know, and I shan't be the last."

"I'm not so cold blooded as you are."

"No, you were always sentimental. But your blood will cool, you'll find, in time: you'll be able to reflect that after all, since I knocked Sir Charles on the head, I only got my deserts. A man grows most gallantly philosophical over his troubles when he's forgotten what they were."

"And do you suppose I shall forget?"

"Suppose? I know it," answered Auburn with deep scorn. "In a couple of years' time you'll be back at Fern-dean giving garden parties. Oh, you won't have forgotten me—Lord, no! You'll say to Violet, 'Vi darling, I think we'll put off those people on Tuesday: you know it's the anniversary of the day poor Auburn was—was—' and there you'll pull up, because you're congenitally incapable of saying hanged——"

"Oh, do be quiet, Auburn! I cannot stand you when you get into that tone. You know I always hated it."

"You seem to hate most of my ways and works at present."

"I hate everything," said Roland. He was broken down by want of sleep and by the long nervous strain, and spoke with the fretfulness of a child. Auburn, still sitting with his arm round his comrade's neck, touched the dark cheek lovingly and lightly with his long brown fingers.

"Are you and I going to apologize to each other? . . . Come, there are still a dozen things I wanted to say. I made my will a few days ago as a precautionary measure, and I've left you a few odds and ends that I thought you might care for: books, pictures, the contents of my rooms in town, personal trifles that I knew no one else would value." Roland could not trust himself to speak. "My

dogs and horses, too—will you give them a home? I shouldn't care to have the Daisy sold to a man who couldn't ride."

"Yes."

"The property of course goes with the title to the Australian branch, and I wish them joy of it! But there's some money of my own, which came to me through my mother—I can't explain now, but I've given Maine full instructions——"

"Beg pardon, sir, but your time's just on up."

Roland started, and so did Auburn: the interruption jarred. "So soon!" said Auburn: "hang you, Binns, I'd forgotten you were there. I know there were no end of things I wanted to say!"

"And I'd one thing to say to you which I've not said."

"Say it now."

"Do you want to see—her?"

"Whom?—Do you mean——?" Roland nodded. "Elle le veut? Ah non, par exemple . . . elle croit que je le veux."

He got up and leaned against the wall, hands in pockets, head thrown back. Roland scrutinized him, but could read nothing in his features: they might have masked either iron self-mastery, or genuine unconcern. "What shall I say?" asked Dodo's ambassador.

"No."

"I am to say No?"

"You are to say No."

"You refuse to see her?" Roland exclaimed, amazed and half indignant. "But, my dear fellow, why?"

"Chut! ne parle pas d'elle," said Auburn imperiously. "Do as I tell you—say No. Say I'd rather not change the old associations for the new: that an interview would only make things harder for both of us—for me especially. Say I don't like touching farewells, and would rather not see any one at all—not Roden, nor Mr. Carminow, nor you

again: that ought to carry conviction. Hurt? No, I think not: we're not all so sensitive as you are. Say I don't wish it, that I shrink from the idea."

"But is that true?" asked Roland. Auburn drew himself up and looked down at him, silently laughing.

"True? Of course it's true! What a brute you are to insult a helpless prisoner!—Now I'm falling into levity again, oh Lord! you and your infernal Puritanical ways—one would think it was you who were going to be hanged, not I. I hope they'll give me a long enough drop, that's all; I don't want . . . I beg your pardon, Roland, I am an ass." He had shocked himself as well as Roland: there were things even for him that did not bear putting into words.

Steps rang again in the corridor; the door was unlocked and a warder appeared on the threshold. Auburn held out his hand and Roland took it in a nerveless grasp. Firm and close was Auburn's pressure.

"Good-bye, old Roland," he said, "the best friend that ever bore a cranky temper. *Sans rancune*, eh?—in case I don't see you again."

"Shall I give any message from you?" asked Roland, resolved to get out of the cell with credit, but hardly knowing how to bear himself under the bitter strain.

Auburn wrenched his hand away and stepped back. "No: I've no messages to send."

XVII.

“ . . . **T**HIS morning they came to tell me the time fixed for the execution, which is to take place on Tuesday next at eight a. m. A painful interview! The chaplain was reduced to tears, poor little chap. Pity they don't put stronger men into the Church: she must lose many through the ineptitude of her ministers. Little Phillips is a dear, good fellow—he comes and prays over me daily and exhorts me to repent. The fact that I don't believe in heaven, or hell, or God, or angel, or demon seems to be beyond the grasp of his queer little rudimentary brain. He thinks it a part of the indecency of my general attitude.

“If I hadn't still some lingering sense of the absurd, I swear I'd make an edifying end just to comfort him. It'll put him out grievously if I die neither penitent nor blaspheming. That an Atheist—he says it with a large A—should be able to face death in a seemingly calm frame of mind is a thing he can't grasp—it upsets all his little theories. Makes him, I verily believe, at times wonder whether there is so much in it as he is pledged to maintain; but he scourges the thought out of his mind as a temptation of the Devil. Lord knows *I* don't want to put it there! It would be an infinite consolation to me to believe in a world that rights the disasters of this. But there's no such world; I can't trick my brains at this time of day. To-morrow week I—this personality through which alone I conceive of the world as existing—will have ceased to exist; but the said world will go on existing much as it did before.

“Little Phillips holds that all unbelief is based on

hypocrisy: on the sinner's rejection of a moral law. Where do parsons live, I wonder? In what circumnambient black fog of prejudice do they walk this earth? Does he think I would not rather believe in a heaven—yes, or in a hell too—than in the void dark? If there were one pin-point of foothold in the infinite, wouldn't I cling to it! To believe that I might live and see Dodo again, however dimly, across any bounds of time or space—or even, leaving the personal element aside, to throw oneself altogether upon illimitable power, by which all mortal wrongs are atoned into one deep everlasting purpose. . . . But no: there's no such purpose. I die and the leaves die, and the only difference is that I suffer and they don't. . . . Come, there's no doubt that I have the religious temperament! Lee was right—I am a *dévol manqué*, not a pure-blooded sceptic as he was himself. Can't I hear him now, as he lay writhing his life out in my arms: 'I don't want a God, I've nowhere to put him.' Clever little Lee, with your shrewd gay eyes and your Gallic impudence! of you already there's nothing left but a handful of bones and half a dozen memories. All the same, I'm grateful to Binns for letting me keep your crucifix. You wore it for a woman's sake, I wear it for yours: who'll wear it for mine? No one: even Dodo could hardly be expected to take it off such a neck as mine will be.

"Let me be quite frank with myself. Do I dread it? Yes, sickeningly: I can't keep my hands still when I think of it. After all, what is it? A short agony. One kicks and dangles in the air for as much as three minutes, I've heard: but after the first minute it's not much more than the mechanical kicking of a frog. I wish I knew. I can't ask any one, though: little Phillips would have a fit if I broached the subject to him, and the medico is not sympathetic to me, I confess. Darnley's a blackguard, and knows it, and knows that I know it. . . . Binns would know, or Madden: but I can't ask them.

"I wish it weren't so beastly undignified. I wish they

didn't pinion one's arms and legs. I wish I'd never heard of that case a year or so back when the trap wouldn't work, and the poor brute was led out three times—ouf! I should break down. He was reprieved in the end: but I'd rather die, and die by slow torture, than be three times dragged up and taken off again. Besides, I dread breaking down.

"Yet I've faced it before, not once nor twice—notably that time in Cuba, when I stayed in the open under fire to watch Lee die, with the bullets whining around me. Much I cared! though one nicked my hair, I remember. But the risk, the fun of the thing pulled one through. There's no fun in this, and no risk: the dice are loaded.

"Also, there's no doubt this prison life is trying, and I've had several months of it. When one's used to be always out of doors or on the sea, facing the sun and wind, this close confinement takes it out of one. . . . In other words, there come moments, not infrequently, when I should like to tear the walls down with my hands, and feel as if I could. Tear them down! I could gnaw my way out with my teeth. . . . Then again, the prison discipline tells on one. I'm not used to be under surveillance. The small indignities are no worse, I dare say, than is necessary, but they chafe. My nerves are out of order. I believe these sickening fits of terror are half nervous, born of the long confinement and bad food and sleep.

"Is one egoist, under these circumstances! A man would think I thought of nothing but myself. He'd be wrong, though: I think of those others often enough, at night, when Madden can't see me. Then, when I grow very sick and don't know how to stand it, I remind myself that it's worse for them than for me. It won't last, though. Nothing lasts: least of all, the memory of the dead.

"For him, the cruel thing is that he believes I'm guilty and deny it. So like him! if there were two views to take, he always chose the darker. I can't for the life of me (not much of an oath that, by the bye) see how he can believe I

should lie to him. Faithful heart! loyal, true, and tender friend! I should royally deserve hanging if I were capable of that. But you do believe it, and protest only rubs the wound: so, when you came to see me, like the augurs, we didn't know which way to look! it was deadly embarrassing. Still, you came. Dear old friend, this be your epitaph: 'He had no faith, yet remained loyal.' But I can't say I derived much pleasure from your visit.

"Only eight days more! It's incredible—it's like a bad dream. Half the time I don't realize it, and when I do it's not only real but realist. After saying so long, 'This day fortnight I shall run up to town, or cut over to Paris for a week-end,' it is so odd to have to say instead, 'This day fortnight I shall be dead and rotting.' I've seen men lie unburied for a week when I was out in Cuba. That was a hot climate, and things went faster: but they go fast enough anywhere. Once drop out of the ranks, and Nature sees to it that you don't long cumber the line of march. This hand of mine, now, so cleverly put together, nerves and sinews, bone and flesh: how stiff it will be in ten days' time! Who was that devil incarnate who dreamed of a future life when the soul was chained to the body? . . . Morbid, eh? Try waiting to be hanged, and see if you're not morbid!

"How the old days haunt one! That last night of the Mays, fourteen years ago—do you remember that, old Roland? We bumped Jesus, and came out head of the river—I'll be sworn you've not forgotten that. You and I pulled together then, and now you think I'm lying to you. Still, you're loyal: let me not be unfair. You do the best you can with a suspicious temperament. But it's fine comedy, to hear you preach to me. So I display too much levity, do I? So do many criminals under sentence, I've heard. Poor devils! if all their levity is of the same calibre as mine. . . .

"This cursed strength of mine! Sickness makes the way easy: but to die with all your strength in you, with your

veins full of blood and your spirit aching for all that only one woman can give. . . .

"If I could only see her—once, once! We've had so little time together, and we've thrown most of it away. I've only once heard her say she loved me, and that was before them all, with the bobby coming up the avenue! I never would have believed that I was capable of caring for any woman as I care for her. What wouldn't I give—if I'd anything to give—to see her just once, even here, even under Binns' eyes, to say good-bye? 'But is that true, Auburn?' Oh, precious Roland! what should we do in this world without fools? He believed it, believed that I didn't care about seeing her—I who was aching with the thirst to see her! And I had only to lift a finger and she'd have come, my white Dodo, to break her heart in this vile hole, to stamp on her mind those memories that can never be effaced—yes: I suspect that such a farewell interview, so unforgettably woeful, would have bound her to me for ever. I could not, face to face, have pretended to do less than adore her. Oh! my darling! oh, my darling! . . . Thank heaven, I had just sufficient manhood to refuse. Bind you to me? No, I love you too well for that. You're young: you'll forget. Not so soon as Roland will: but soon enough. I give him a couple of years, you three or four . . . three to be healed, four or five to love again and marry . . . and another man will have all that I never had, and—and you'll call your eldest boy Charles! You won't see the joke, bless you. Neither shall I, then: but I do now.

"Steady, you coward! You may be as much of a coward as you like under your skin, but I swear to you, you shan't whimper. No, you shall not send so much as your love. You shall do what you can to make it easy for her to forget. . . . You fool! you may as well do it with a good grace. . . ."

XVIII.

HAD Auburn only known it, he might have spared himself much suffering, for the message that had cost him so dear was but idle breath. Dodo listened to it gravely, thanked Roland, and said to Roden, "I shall go the day before the end."

It was late on the Monday afternoon when she passed the doors of Hillingdon Prison. The fallow October day—a day of vexing wind and flaws of rain—was drawing towards an early close. The clouds were so thickly folded that the whole face of heaven was darkened: only in the west, here and there, light peered through a brownish rift. The leaves of a stripped acacia danced in the prison yard. Within, the gloom of the weather was accentuated by the cold cleanliness of flagged floors and yellow walls. Roden, who had obtained leave to go with her to the door of Auburn's cell, saw her shiver as her eyes fell on the trapeze-work of stout wire netting which was stretched from side to side and from end to end of the central hall at the level of each landing. Although Hillingdon was but a county jail, that network had been found necessary to keep prisoners from cracking their skulls on the floor of the hall below.

The warder who was their escort unlocked the door of the visitors' room and went in before them, but Dodo followed so quickly that he had no time to prepare Auburn, who was sitting with his arms folded on the table. The prisoner sprang to his feet. Dodo came to him and held out her hands, he took them, and so held her for a few moments: till without a word she threw her arms round him and laid down her head.

"I told you not to come, Dodo."

"I'd have come if I'd been dying—I'd have come from the dead."

Silence again, and for both a space of pure forgetfulness. Passion, like a fire, had burnt up what had been and what was to come after; for the lovers nothing existed but their love.

"Lift your face," said Auburn. "I've dreamed of it so often, and couldn't always remember it." Dodo raised her head, white and tense as he had seen it in the courtroom, her eyes blue as steel and undimmed by tears. "Dodo, you won't forget me?"

"No, Charles."

"*Don't* forget me!"

"My darling, I promise you——"

He laid his hand over her lips: his face was colorless. "Hush! You're not to say it. What a fool—what a scoundrel I am!" She saw him crushing and chaining down the anguish that had momentarily betrayed itself, repressing his love and agony and weakness and fear, schooling himself to talk quietly and to look carelessly, to unfasten eyes from eyes and heart from heart. Very gently he disengaged himself from her arms, and drew forward his own chair, and made her sit down, himself seated sideways on the edge of the table close by: and her lover, broken down by suffering, of a moment ago was once more the self-contained Auburn of Stanton Mere. Dodo could hardly breathe for the constriction of her throat: her own grief sank under the intolerable burden of pity. She thought him needlessly cruel to himself and to her, till with his next words illumination broke upon her. He was not weak, to let the jailer's presence trouble him—he had been, he could have continued to be, royally indifferent to that: nor vain, to nurse his own dignity; his rigid, iron-handed self-control was based on a worthier motive than self-consciousness or pride.

"Please don't say or think of saying anything of that sort, Dodo. I don't want you to swear eternal constancy."

"Why not?"

"Really—" he was bending over her and his voice had dropped to a murmur, but his manner was cool to the brink of hardness—"that kind of thing strikes me as rather absurd. Where's the use of it? You lose, and I don't gain."

"You think to-morrow is the end of everything?"

"'In heaven they neither marry . . .'" On your own showing, you see, there's no chance for us. We might meet as angels, my dear: but that would give me no satisfaction. No: our little romance—so short it's been, hasn't it?—is finished and done with. You oughtn't to have come here to-day. Didn't that ass Roland give you my message?"

"Of course he did," Dodo answered with a derisive accent, "taking precautions not to wound me. But I discerned your native candour through his wrappings of politeness, and, you see, I understood." She saw the nervous movement of his fingers, clenched over the edge of the table, and pitied him. "But we'll play the game, if you like. Let me see, what's it to be? You're to die to-morrow, and that's to be the end of you, and I—I'm to get it over it and marry some one else, I suppose?"

"What's that?" said Auburn, perturbed, thrown out of his part. "Dodo—you're talking nonsense."

"Am I? You see this little romance—this boy and girl affair of ours—has given me a certain degree of acuteness, and—oh, have it your own way! Do you know you're looking very ill, Charles?"

She touched his hand: it was cold and wet, and his face was lined like that of a man of fifty. She saw that he was resolute, and that she was throwing a heavy strain on him to no purpose, and after a moment she began to speak in an altered tone, frankly and gently, without passion and without irony, though all the strength of her nature revolted against the loss of their last hour together.

"People have been very kind. Roland told you we were going to petition? It has come to nothing, of course, but still I'm glad we tried it. We had over six hundred thousand names. Many people believe you're innocent, you know. Roland offered a reward of a thousand pounds: that has come to nothing, too, but I was glad he did it."

"Heroic of him, as he's not one of those who believe."

"Yes, that is queer. I was talking about it to Mrs. Carew the other day: she's very loyal, she made me understand his position better than I ever did before. You see, he was prepossessed with the idea that if you and Sir Charles met you would quarrel, and he seems to have had an almost superstitious dread of what would come of it: so, when the news came, it was hardly so much as a surprise—it was only a confirmation of what he had feared from the first."

"Your apologetics are thrown away, my dear: I know Roland's ways. I should have been more surprised if he had believed me."

"Are you trying to convince me that you were not hurt—cut to the heart—by what he said? Don't, Charles: you won't succeed."

"He did sting," Auburn owned, "but don't you tell him I said so. How you read me, Dodo!"

"Profoundly, don't I? Never mind, I won't be disconcerting any more. I pity Mr. Carew when the truth comes out, though: he'll never forgive himself."

"I rather hope the truth never will come out. Think of old Dymock's feelings—to say nothing of the jury!"

"I doubt if Mr. Dymock will feel anything at all. He's very ill: he had a sort of stroke only a day or two after the trial, and he's been unconscious or light-headed ever since."

"Really! Poor old chap, I'm sorry for that: he was very decent to me—cut short his peroration, for which I was grateful. Tell me how all your own people are."

"Bernard's very fit. One would really think he was rather pleased than otherwise. He turned up to lunch yesterday. We're still at the Carews', you know, Roddy and I, and the others come and go. It's rather an unconscionable visit, but they evidently don't mind—I think Roland hardly realizes what goes on round him. Father sent his love to you. He's one of those who believe, by the bye: it was what you said in court that finally convinced him."

"I've a vague impression that I made rather a fool of myself."

Oh no! You were remarkably dignified, I assure you: not a shade of self-consciousness, that struck us all. Father saw it in print, and told us that if he had not known you he would, from his experience of the way men tell lies, have betted his last sou you were speaking the truth."

"How are the boys?"

"Very distressed. Dickie has gone back to his regiment: he couldn't get an extension of leave, and I think he was glad to go. Caron has been at his rooms in town, but he came down to Ferndean yesterday. He helped us to get heaps of theatrical and artistic signatures. Roddy of course is staying with me. He brought me here to-day: I wanted him to come in for half a minute, but he wouldn't."

"Why not?"

Dodo shook her head. "Roddy is very queer. There was always a queer strain in him, and all this has developed it. He tries hard to be normal, but I know him pretty well, and I'm sure there is something wrong. He liked you very much, and he's always been a great dear to me, but there's more than brotherly affection in the way he's taken this. Dr. Sartoris used to say that he was highly nervous, and I think the horror of it has worn on his nerves. Grace said once that he looks as if he was ghost-ridden."

"Grace?"

"Grace Trevor. She's here at the Carews' for a few nights."

"To see you through? Good old girl! Have you seen anything of Lesbia?"

"Not since the trial. Jeannie has been ill, and Lesbia stayed at home to nurse her—so Mr. Carew said: he went in there one day. But we have been very busy, you know: petitions take up a lot of time, organizing and despatching forms and getting the printing done. Oh, and, Charles—I wanted to thank you for something that Mr. Carew told me."

"You were not angry?"

"No: I understood. It was very good of you to think of it."

"I do not see you working for your living, Dodo: and—forgive me—one doesn't grow rich nowadays in the Church."

"We're not millionaires," said Dodo dryly. "I've always looked forward to being a nursery governess or a lady's companion in my declining years: always, that is, till I thought I should be your wife."

She leaned back in her chair and was silent for a little while. Within the prison the evening had darkened fast: so little light came in through the high, barred window even by daytime that the room was now full of shadows. They could almost have imagined themselves alone. Still seated on the edge of the table, with his arms folded, and his head thrown back, Auburn had completely regained control of himself, and looked so full of life and so vigorously healthy, with his tanned skin and brilliant eyes, that it was hard to believe him not twenty-four hours from death. If she had wished to go on talking at the same level, Dodo would have done well to give herself no leisure to think. A shudder seized her and shook her from head to foot. "Dear, what is it?" said Auburn, quickly, bending over her.

"This time to-morrow——!" said Dodo with a gesture of horror.

"Why, you won't see me," said Auburn, "that won't hurt you."

"Oh, don't, Charles!" Dodo cried out: and then, half suffocating, "oh, don't make me laugh!" Auburn threw his arm round her: he had spoken in good faith, and could not now see exactly where the joke lay, but he had seen hysteria once or twice in men, and knew the real from the less dangerous variety. "Don't make a scene, Dodo!" he said roughly, and Dodo, white and shaken, came gradually back from the borderland. But he dared not withdraw his arm, and in that close bodily contact there came to Dodo the certainty that she could not any longer bear to be held spiritually away from him. She leaned her head against him: her lips were close to his ear.

"Do you think I care?" she murmured: "do you think I would not love to hold you, dead, to-morrow as you're holding me to-day? You know so very little of women."

"Don't know: I've had plenty of experience."

"I am not amenable to those tactics: you can't make me jealous. How fantastic you are, Charles! Why do you want to keep me at arm's length?"

"Do I look like keeping you at arm's length?"

"You're doing it. I shall never marry any one but you. Don't you believe that?"

Auburn was silent, but the strong, sardonic curve of his mouth betrayed his mind.

"What! you think I shall marry?"

"My child, you're very young. Constancy is a virtue much believed in by youth: at my age one finds it hard to distinguish it from a vice."

"I only know there never will be any other man in the world for me but you."

"Of course not!" said Auburn derisively, "besides, you'll die of a broken heart before a twelvemonth is over."

"No, I shan't; it isn't so easy when you're young and strong. But I never shall forget."

"Dodo, you can't devote yourself to the memory of a man that was hanged: it's too squalid. Besides," he saw her flinch, and tried to soften the harshness of his own words, "you are such a child: you've only known me a few weeks. This day six months ago you had never set eyes on me. Be content with the loyalty you've given me while I was alive, and don't try to turn yourself into a little weeping willow over my grave. You're too young, and I'm too old, and—and the whole affair is too sickeningly hard lines on a child like you." He could not go on: Dodo's deep ironical eyes mocked him from his cynicism, genuine though it was. He had not an atom of faith in her, but she could make him ashamed of his want of faith. Indeed, she had great power over him, greater than she had ever realized before: and strong and strange the desire came upon her to make full trial of that power, to plumb the depths of this uncharted sea which was bearing her ship so far out of sight of land. She threw her arm round his neck and drew him down against her. Unable to extricate himself, Auburn knelt at her side, leaning his head against her breast, his breath coming in labored gasps: weakened by the long confinement and nervous strain, he was within an ace of breaking down, and would have done it—so thoroughly had Dodo wrought upon him—if it had not been for his inflexible determination to leave her free. What he did not understand was that Dodo, reading his struggles with her acute woman's eyes, was more profoundly moved by them than she ever would have been by a weak appeal for pity. She held him locked in her arms, as if she would have defied death itself to take him from her. "Oh, my darling," she said, weeping, "I did not think it could hurt so to love any one."

"Don't cry, dear."

"I wish I'd married you—I wish I'd made you marry

me in prison. I can't bear to have you die without believing me. Do you think I could bear to suffer like this twice over?"

"No, my sweetheart: I think next time you will probably have better luck."

"You think that I shall have another lover after you, and let another man hold me as you're holding me? I should feel myself unchaste for ever. It would be a sin."

"No, Dodo: it will be perfectly natural and right."

"Oh!" said Dodo, outraged. "Charles, you must believe me!"

"I do believe you. I know you mean it—now: but in five years' time——"

"—— or in fifty years' time, I'll never forget you, never! Listen: I give you my word of honor, I swear to you by this love of ours which I believe will be eternal——"

He had freed himself, and sprang up: he turned on Binns with a movement of command. "Get that door open!" he said. Binns stared at him, dumbfounded: he had witnessed some curious farewell interviews, but Auburn's white fury was a novelty to him. "Will you get that door open, damn you?" said Auburn. Dodo rose: in her, too, the feeling momentarily dominant was a paradoxical anger.

"All right, I'm going," she said. She walked to the door and called through it. "Roden, make them let me out, please."

"I told you not to come," said Auburn sullenly.

"I certainly shan't come again," said Dodo.

"No . . ." said Auburn.

Their eyes met, and Dodo realized what she was saying. Her heart died within her: but with that realization came also the knowledge that she had not hurt him, for he understood. Meanwhile the door was unlocked and Roden entered with a warder. It was all over, the end had come. "Come, dear," said Roden, drawing her hand through his

arm: and without one word more Dodo went out into the corridor. Roden turned in the doorway to wave his hand to Auburn, standing motionless in the middle of the room: and he saw, what Dodo did not see, the white change that went over the prisoner's face when this last instant came. But there was nothing to be done: the intolerable had to be borne: and good-tempered Binns, brushing the back of his hand across his eyes, shut the door and relocked it.

“Dodo has come and gone. I would I had never seen her. My love, my darling! I never shall see her again, not in this world nor in the next. I wish I could be alone for ten minutes.

“She's pretty, is Dodo; slight and fine, with eyes like blue steel, and white, fine features. Eminently pretty and marriageable. . . . O God! O God! Steady, my friend: you verge on the grotesque, with your insane jealousy. You, jealous? Et pour cause! A dead man jealous of the living . . . you'll be an acceptable lover by this time to-morrow, eh? No, you must let her go—*let* her go? as if you could keep her! They'll all forget me, all, all! the world will go on its way exactly as if I had never lived.

“At all events death brings annihilation: there's no jealousy in the grave.”

XIX.

TRAGIC events claim, but rarely gain, a tragic setting. For one human soul that suffers amid storm, and dark, and silence, ten have to play out their parts in the kitchen or the drawing-room, drying their eyes to face the gaslight, steeling their lips to talk politics, or the last new play.

Life at Ferndean had flowed on pretty much as usual during Auburn's trial, and now, on the last night of his life, the routine of dressing and dining had to be gone through, and conversation kept up before the servants, though no one could eat anything, or cared to hear what his neighbor said. Dodo herself, on her return from the jail, had told Roden that she should stay in her room: but when the dressing-bell rang a flickering gleam of humor made her spring up to change her clothes. She saw the inevitable tray, the glass of port and the wing of chicken. Too absurd, all that!

The men did not linger over their wine, and by nine o'clock all the inmates of Ferndean were gathered in the great hall. No sadder company had ever gathered there, since the days when Amyas Carew built it to please his young wife, six months before he fell at Sedgmoor—for the Carews had been Protestant always, and rebels whenever their principles allowed. The old hall had seen many lives come and go, merrily or sadly; but no ordinary death could have created such an oppression as reigned in it now.

It was a place of shadows. To-night it was unlit, except for a couple of shaded lamps, and for the dance of brightness painted over Jacobean wainscoting and smoke-darkened beams by the flames that leaped on the great hearth.

The staircase, broad and shallow and slippery as glass, was also Jacobean, and a curiosity: an oak peacock spread his clipped plumage on each finial of the balustrade. Near by a tall window, opening on the terrace, framed a peep of moonlit and stormy landscape, while snatches of broken music, no less stormy, floated through the half-closed door of the drawing-room, where Roland Carew sat alone in the dark, touching the keys as the whim came on him.

All those most deeply interested in Auburn's fate were there, for Carew had thrown open his house with a hospitality not only ungrudging but unconscious. All that he had was at the service of Auburn and of Auburn's friends. Roden and Dodo had stayed at Ferndean since July: Mr. Carminow had come up a week since to look after his children: and the day before had brought Caron, and also, after a hard fight with her parents, Grace Trevor. She was Dodo's only woman friend, and she knew that Dodo would have need of friendship in the coming dread hours.

So far, however, Grace owned sorrowfully that she was useless. Dodo had tried to sew, to read: an open book, a litter of needle-work testified to her mind's disorder. She stood by the window looking out into the half-dark of the wild night, where now and then the moon, peering out between banks of driven cloud, held up her wan crescent notched and streaked with their jagged blackness. Dead leaves whirled like withered elves over the long autumnal grass, and the trees, almost bare, writhed their giant arms downward and up again under the hammering of the gale. The wind hooted through them in a loud, high, prolonged piping, like the hoot of sirens over the sea.

Dodo was beyond thought. During long intervals she lost all consciousness of her surroundings. She was back in Auburn's cell, re-living the evening's interview, steeping herself in a sense of warmth and strong vitality. She felt his arms close round her in the recklessness of passion and draw her down against his breast, against his hurried

breathing and the heavy throb of his heart. Meanwhile the Dutch clock in the hall, with the clicking of its brass pendulum, ticked off the last seconds of his life on earth. Once or twice Dodo heard it, and said to herself, "This time tomorrow he will be dead and stiff," but the words had no meaning.

Not far off sat her father, watching her and Caron—the latter an habitual anxiety—under cover of the *Times*. Poor Mr. Carminow! It was a hard fate that had plunged him into such a business. Epicurean that he was, a life spent in doing good had not taught him to face grief as inevitable, and with an exquisite pitying tenderness both for Auburn and for Dodo was mixed up an angry wonder that Providence should suffer such miseries to go on.

The same vein of weakness as ran through Mr. Carminow's character reappeared in a different form in his second son. Caron, after varying all day between fits of wild excitement and irritable gloom, had been persuaded to lie down on the sofa with a book recommended by Violet Carew: the book—a clever sketch of modern Danish art, interleaved with line engravings—had proved unexpectedly interesting: and Caron was as deeply absorbed in it as a strong sense of the dramatic allowed. Now and then he ruffled the pages impatiently, or threw it down with a sigh, but he soon picked it up again.

Roden too was deep in a book—a weak library novel: turning leaf after leaf with a face devoid of expression and eyes riveted to the print. Fair, and wearing only a slight moustache, he had a deceptively youthful and innocent air, and nothing in his dress (point device as ever) or personal appearance suggested that he had a care in the world. None the less Violet Carew, raising her head now and again from her needle-work to glance at him, felt her eyelids burn.

Near the fire sat Grace Trevor, squarely upright in an oak chair, her needles clicking in and out of a silk tie. She too found her sight more than once so dim that she could

not count her stitches. A sense of sadness, irremediable, insufferable, weighed upon her. She grieved for Auburn, as well as for Dodo: it seemed to her but yesterday that she had watched him come swinging across the moor in his flower and pride of life. But now he must die, and with him, as Grace full well knew, the flower of Dodo's life would wither too: and well for all if it were only Dodo! No wonder that such bitter dew gathered again and again in Grace Trevor's loyal eyes.

The strain of Celtic blood in Roland Carew broke out in his playing. Although not always note-perfect, he had the born musician's hand: a touch that made the wires throb like harp-strings. So long as he confined himself to broken snatches of harmony, the *Appassionata* with its tragic opening chords, the mountain-music of the *Wilhelm Tell*, his audience were content: but by and by he struck upon a theme which made some of them shiver. The wail of this lament, its note of inconsolable anguish, was too much like a woman crying to fall agreeably on Roden's ear: while Mr. Carminow rustled his newspaper as if he would have liked to drown it, and Caron, the intemperate, threw down his Danish Art and started up with a word of anger.

"What on earth is that thing Carew's playing?"

"Chopin's funeral march," said Dodo.

Roden strolled over to the open door. "Play something lighter, Carew, if you don't mind—'Songs of Araby,' or the Waltz in *Faust*. You're rather—premature."

Roland stopped dead, horrified, in the middle of a bar. He answered out of the dark, his full, grave tones a rebuke to Roden's ironical affectation. "I'm very sorry. It came into my head, and I forgot what it was. I never meant to play it."

"Wait a few hours," said Dodo.

Roland Carew's music and Caron's curious anger had shaken her out of her abstraction. She came to the fire and stood leaning her arm along the high oaken chimney-piece,

stretching out her left hand to the flames, which struck green sparks out of Auburn's emerald. *Foy pour devoir*: so ran the legend on the gold against her skin. The heavy silence was broken by the chime of the clock striking ten.

"Dodo, my darling," said Mr. Carminow, "won't you go to bed? You'll be so tired to-morrow——" he broke off: not one of them dared face the thought of that morrow. "I don't want my little girl to make herself ill."

She tried to rouse herself, to respond with a smile to his loving care. "I'll go in a little while. It's so early yet, darling."

Violet Carew threw in a quiet word to introduce a safe impersonal element into the nascent talk. "Has any one heard how Mr. Dymock is to-day?"

"No better," said Roden. "They doubt if he will recover consciousness at all before the end."

"What is really the matter?" asked Grace Trevor.

"A stroke of paralysis, they tell me. I heard he was feeling very ill before the trial, but no one had any idea that he would collapse so suddenly within three or four days. So far as we're concerned, though, it makes no difference: we had nothing to hope from him. The summing-up was dead against us, and Maine tells me his notes were examined and found to be quite conclusive."

Roden spoke with a touch of deliberation. Conversation on indifferent topics being impracticable, it seemed to him that any sort of conversation was better than none at all, and so it did to Mr. Carminow. Anything to soothe Dodo's restlessness and recall her brooding fancy!

"Maine didn't tell me they had looked over his papers, but I'm glad of it. It would be intolerable to feel that the fate of the petition was affected by the accident of a judge's illness."

"Accident!" repeated Caron. "There's precious little accident about the case, it seems to me. Men don't crack their own skulls by accident."

"You mean that there must have been some one who did it? Yes: isn't that a queer idea?" said Dodo slowly.

She turned her hand about in the firelight and watched the green gleams flash this way and that. "That really is the strangest part in the whole affair—the part of it that I find hardest to realize. Some one must have killed Sir Charles, and apparently—for all the evidence points that way—it must have been some one who lived near and knew his habits. It couldn't have been an ordinary burglar, because nothing was stolen: it could hardly have been a planned revenge, or the man would have brought a weapon of his own. In fact, what with Charles in the garden, and Lesbia awake at the lodge, and Sir Charles himself, so far as we know, more than usually sober, it's hard to see how any one could have got in at all without attracting attention, unless he knew the ins and outs of the place very well. It looks almost as if it had been some one inside the house, and yet there was no shadow of ground for suspecting any of the servants. But isn't it queer to think that somewhere in the world, and not improbably in this very village, there is a man who, if he'd only confess, would still be in time to clear Charles?"

"Only confess—only slip the noose round his own throat," said Caron: "thank you: that is a considerable proposal. Men aren't so fond of chucking their lives away! I would not do it."

"I would," said Mr. Carminow. "I mean that if I had done such a thing, and were secure from detection, and had no particular moral scruples, I should give myself up all the same. Imagine what that man's feelings must be like! I can conceive nothing more dreadful than to stand by and see an innocent man suffer, knowing that a word from you could end it."

"Nor I," said Dodo. "One would never be able to get the thought of it out of one's mind."

"How do you know?" said Caron, willing as usual to

argue any case from any standpoint. "He might have some perfectly unselfish and legitimate reason for holding his tongue—you never can tell. Suppose he were married and his wife were very ill——"

"That would be a motive, not an excuse," said Dodo. "If he were guilty it ought to be his wife who suffered, not Charles'."

Caron dropped that instance, with a sensation of having burnt his fingers. "Well! take the case of a priest in the confessional."

"But the priest is not the guilty man," Dodo objected.

"No: but we're assuming that he knows who the guilty man is. He's an accessory."

"Then it would be his duty to speak out," said Mr. Carminow. "No such pledge of secrecy, however solemn, could justify a man in keeping silence under such circumstances."

"Now I call that frankly immoral," said Caron. "If a man has promised to hold his tongue he ought to hold it, and you Christians should be the last persons to blame him. Don't all your doctrines teach the sin of doing evil that good may come? A promise is a moral obligation, and you are no more entitled to break it to save another man's life than to save your own."

"Logical," said Mr. Carminow: "all the same, if I were ever in such a horrible dilemma I should prefer to risk my soul for the sake of an innocent man. Whoso loseth his life shall find it."

"Who talks about risking one's soul?" Caron retorted scornfully. "My priest wouldn't care twopence whether he were damned or the other thing—all he'd think of would be the eternal Yea and Nay. He'd argue like this: sin is wrong, and God is all-powerful, and if God wanted this innocent man's life saved He could do it without my sin: so I'll have faith and hold my tongue."

"And Charles and I'd go to the wall," said Dodo. "Your

priest is a saint, Car; but saints like that inflict horrible suffering."

"A saint? I am not sure," said Mr. Carminow. "In the first place he would have to be very sure of his own motives: one grain of the fear of hell would be enough to damn him. And what man could be sure——"

"It's impossible to read while you're all talking," said Roden.

He sprang up, threw down his book, and went out through the tall window into the garden, leaving them all astonished. Mr. Carminow half rose, then sat down again. Dodo turned round and gazed after her brother, whose low hurried accents were as strange to her ear as the roughness of his words. Violet Carew sat arrested, needle in hand, with a curious startled look.

"The boy's nerves are out of order," said Mr. Carminow gravely. "I never knew Roddy to say a rude thing before."

"He is sleeping badly," said Caron.

"That is it, then; insomnia will make the sweetest-tempered fellow irritable. After all," added Mr. Carminow with a faint smile, "it was merely in the family, for neither Mrs. Carew nor our dear Grace was guilty of contributing to the conversation. But really we shall have to get him away. I can't have Roddy growing pert to me at my time of life. I'm used to it from some of my sons, but this is a new departure."

"We shall all go after to-morrow," said Dodo. "There'll be nothing to stay for."

Her words produced a momentary silence, in the middle of which Grace Trevor stuck her needles through her tie, replaced it in her work-bag, and silently followed Roden out on the terrace. She knew perfectly well that Caron would find spirit enough to grin intelligently, and that Mr. Carminow would be vexed; but at that moment she cared nothing for the opinion of her world, being altogether

driven by the strong wish to attempt some form of consolation. She came out into the wild fury of the blast; its piercing coldness struck on her bare arms and throat, but Grace was hardy and cared little for that. When her eyes grew used to the comparative darkness, she made out Roden standing with arms folded on the high stone balustrade. He did not hear her, he did not see her, and the first intimation of her presence came to him when she linked her arm through his. Even then he scarcely stirred, and made no effort to conceal his misery. Grace felt a hand catch at her heart. She threw an arm round his neck. They had known each other since the days of corals and perambulators, and it was Roden's oldest friend and all but sister who came to him in his sore need. "Dear old fellow," said Grace softly, "what is it?"

"Nothing."

"You were awfully fond of Auburn, I know." Roden made a sound of distress. "Did it upset you, seeing him this evening? Dodo said you went into the cell."

"I was only in a second."

"Did he look very bad?"

"Yes—no: it depends what you call bad. He was cool enough, except his eyes."

"Poor old Charles," said Grace sorrowfully. She was feeling her way in the dark, uncertain of the exact source of Roden's grief, and still more uncertain how far he would support her interference. She need not have been afraid, for Roden had come to that pass when any companionship is a relief, and when the grasp of a friendly hand seems to be the one thing stable amid the chances and changes of life. "It'll be better when to-morrow's over," she said, out of the depths of a considerable experience. "This waiting's enough to kill any one. But when once the wrench is over, we shall begin to pick ourselves up again. Because the world must go on, Roddy. We can't all die."

"No."

"You'll have to go back to your regiment in a few weeks, I suppose?"

"I suppose so."

"What an awful crash it all is! I'm not trying to make light of it, you know: only—good times and bad times and all times pass over. This is the very darkest time of all. We've got to buck up and get through it somehow, old boy, for Dodo's sake: she's rather dependent on you just now." Grace found it hard to search for consolation without well knowing what pain it was she had to comfort. "You can do more for her than any one else, she's so awfully fond of you, and she trusts you so——"

"Oh don't—don't, dear," said Roden under his breath.

The moon came out of the clouds at that moment, and Grace saw his face. She held her peace, terror-stricken. Then Roden dropped his head on his arms, and Grace, the first shock of dismay over, tightened the clasp of her arm round his neck, and laid down her head on his shoulder.

"Roddy, Roddy," she said, weeping, "don't look like that! It's not your fault, anyhow—you can't help it! Dear old boy, I can't bear to see you so wretched!"

Bitter-sweet was the cup that Grace was drinking. The raving confusion of the wind, the cloud-shadows that went sailing in ragged blots over flagged terrace and beaded lawn, even the stinging chill of a sudden little fall of rain—all this storm-scene in black and grey was, for her, only the setting that framed the most intimate and tender moment her life had ever known. That her sympathy did Roden good was plain when at length he raised his head and smiled at her with eyes weary and infinitely sad, but calm.

"Did I scare you, old Grace? I'm sorry! There's nothing to be scared about. I've—I've had an awful time to-day, what with Dodo and one thing and another. But as you say, the thing's inevitable, so we must pull ourselves together and face it. What a brute I am to have kept you out here in the cold—By Jove! what's the row about?"

An electric bell had rung out suddenly loud and long, and so close in their ear that it made them both start. Looking up, they saw that a small window stood open near the tall window that opened into the hall. "Oh, it's only the telephone," said Grace, "that's the telephone room, you know, in there——"

The words died away in her throat as she met Roden's eyes. "Who on earth can be ringing us up at this time of night?" he said, stammering over the words. "Let's go in and—and see who it is. . . . Why on earth doesn't some one go?"

Grace followed him into the hall—an odd scene, on such trivial grounds. Mr. Carminow was standing up, still grasping his paper. Caron lay back on his cushions, lividly pale. Dodo, beaten from her self-control, had slipped down on a chair and looked as if she were about to faint. Meanwhile the bell had never left off ringing. At the same moment Roland came out of the drawing-room. "Who—who's that?" he asked.

"Good heavens!" said Roden, "look at the child! My darling, there isn't an atom of hope——!"

"No, no," said Violet Carew quickly, "don't talk to her—go and see who it is."

Her words were half drowned in the sharp iterated tingling of the bell. Roden made three steps of it to the telephone room and caught up the receiver, leaving the door wide open, so that every word he said was audible to all.

"Hullo . . . yes . . . I'm here . . . Yes, it's Carminow. Who are you? . . . What? I can't hear . . . *Can't hear.* I want to know who you are, first. . . . Oh! All right, go on . . . Yes, we're all here—we're waiting . . . Yes, all of us . . . Yes, my sister too . . . *Go away?* No, I'm certain she won't! You needn't be afraid, we're resigned to anything. Let us have the worst . . . Oh, very well." He lowered the receiver and turned round, looking at Dodo. "It's Maine with some news for us."

"Has he killed himself?" said Dodo.

"Are you there? . . . Yes, I've warned her: *will* you go on? I tell you nothing could be worse than this hell of suspense. . . . What? Are you sure? . . . Is it—is there no mistake? . . ."

Grace touched his arm. "Roden, you're killing Dodo."

"It is a reprieve," said Roden. "Maine has just had a wire from the Home Office."

"A reprieve?"

"The sentence is commuted to penal servitude for life."

"Stop a moment, Roddy," said Grace Trevor.

She ran and caught Dodo in her arms. Dodo had broken down into frightful convulsive sobbing, into the tears that disfigure and unnerve; but she fought hard for composure, and was soon quiet enough to raise her head, from which all semblance of youth and beauty had vanished, and bid Roden go on. He did so, repeating sentence by sentence the infinitesimal whisper that crept to him over the electric wires.

"They wired to Hillingdon before they wired to Maine. Auburn was to be told instantly. Probably he knows by now. Major White would go to him in prison. . . . Maine says it is a most extraordinary case. He has never known a reprieve left so late. . . . It was Dymock who did it. He became conscious this morning, and Mrs. Dymock spoke to him about it. Then he made her telephone to the Home Office, and old Hardyng himself came round in his car and saw him. He was very weak but quite clear-headed, and he was strongly in favor of a reprieve. . . . It seemed Hardyng had been wavering, and this knocked him clean off his pins . . . gave him a pretext . . . He didn't want the Opposition to say he gave in to popular clamor. . . . Maine pumped all this out of one of Hardyng's secretaries. . . . Nobody seems to know exactly what made Dymock alter his mind. . . . Hardyng only had a few minutes with him. . . . Maine says he's sending congratu-

lations to Auburn, and if we've any message shall he add it? He thinks the prison officials will put it through."

There was no reply. Roden looked round: the aspect of his audience brought a sudden nervous laugh to his lips.

"Shall I say you're all rather sorry?" he asked. "You look it."

"I—I can't realize it," said Mr. Carminow, brushing his hand over his forehead. "We—we've been so close to the edge——"

Caron struck in with his characteristic harsh irony. "Does Maine propose to congratulate him on being sent to penal servitude for life? By the Lord, I think apologies ought to be the order of the day."

"No, no!" said Dodo.

She sprang up, came to Roden, and took the receiver from his hand.

"Are you there, Mr. Maine? . . . Roden says you're writing to Charles . . . thank you. Will you write these words, then—just this and nothing more? You have a pencil? . . .

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—It will probably not be more than twenty years. I will wait, if you will.—Always yours,
Dodo."

XX.

AS Maine had told Roden, it was the jail governor himself who conveyed to Auburn the news of the reprieve. When the tall soldierly figure came in, Auburn was still sitting at the table; he had not lifted his head since Dodo's departure, five hours before. Major White came to the point at once, without beating about the bush. Having risen at his entrance, Auburn remained standing: he said nothing, till the Governor, a kindly man, asked him if he felt ill. At that Auburn pulled himself together to utter a few words of thanks, and Major White, himself intensely relieved, withdrew. An hour later Auburn was taken from the condemned cell, and placed alone in a different part of the prison.

Except for a glimpse of his solicitor, Auburn had no further intercourse with the outer world. A few days later he was awakened early in the morning by a warder coming into his cell, who told him to get up and dress at once. He did so, and in twenty minutes' time his breakfast was brought to him—eight ounces of bread, half an ounce of margarine, and a pint of porridge. It was half-past six on a clammy November morning when he left Hillingdon jail, handcuffed and under escort of two warders, one of whom sat beside him in the fly, and the other on the box.

They had some time to wait at the station. Auburn stood on the platform in a drizzle of rain, while the gas-jets, paling in that dreariest of twilights which precedes a wet winter's dawn, flared over the soiled yet staring advertisements, the grinning monkey who won't wash clothes, the buxom young woman with a cigarette between her teeth.

Auburn wished he could have had a cigarette himself. Used to smoke at all hours, he found the longing for tobacco harder to bear even than the pangs of hunger, which played a prosaic but important part in his discomfort.

By and by the train came in, and habit directed his steps towards a first-class compartment. Felons do not, however, travel first-class, and assistant-warder Mackinnon, with something like a faint grin discernible on his weather-beaten countenance, put his charge into an empty third. He and his chief sat down—the one by Auburn's side, the other opposite—and the door was locked upon them.

Icy fogs of dawn under the gloomy arch of a London station: interminable platforms to be crossed, prisoner's right wrist linked to the left wrist of Principal Warder Brown, while drowsy porters grinned apathetically, and travelers, less inured to the spectacle, turned round to stare after the prison uniforms. When they were in their seats, quite a knot of observers gathered at the train door, till Brown, compassionating Auburn's silent endurance, pulled down the blinds, to be lightly thanked for his good-nature. Like most of his class with whom the prisoner then or later came in contact, he had a fine face, manly, intelligent, and kind.

This second train journey was short. Alighting, Auburn was marched out into the station yard, where he had to wait a few minutes: here there was no blind to be pulled down, and he was hard put to it to keep his countenance under a running fire of comment from a sympathetic crowd. At length Mackinnon arrived with a four-wheeler, and all three got in, and were driven off through the mean streets of a slum suburb. Auburn had held his tongue all the way up in the train, a thing he never liked doing: now he turned on his escort with a question—"Where are you taking me?"

Brown hesitated, and it dawned upon Auburn that he was not used to be spoken to so freely. But he gave the name of the prison in a perfectly civil tone, though with

an assumption of equality which was not the less annoying because evidently unconscious.

"How long shall I be there?"

"That's for the Governor to say, I expect."

"Is it a decent place? I mean——" Auburn realized that the terms of his question stood in some need of amendment—"is the food good, and so forth?"

"Good enough, I reckon. Prison life is pretty much what you make it yourself; if you keep out o' trouble and behave properly, you won't find it come so hard. 'Course, if you give us trouble, we're bound to give you trouble."

"Is the work hard?"

The man looked at him with a good-natured smile. "That depends on what you're used to. It's Trade Union time—eight hours a day."

"What do you do with yourself—I mean, what do we do with ourselves—the rest of the day?" Auburn asked, his curiosity beginning to wake up. Viewed afar off, twenty years is twenty years, but seen near at hand it is twenty times three hundred and sixty five days, of which the first is to-morrow. "Surely I shan't have to stick in my cell the whole time?"

"Your work's done in your cell," Brown answered. "You won't be out of it at all, except for an hour's exercise. That's what they call solitary confinement, that is."

"How long does it last?" asked Auburn after a silence.

"Five months: but you won't be here all that time. You'll finish your time in Portland or Princetown, most likely—I don't know which, and I couldn't tell you if I did."

"They've all got to begin like that," Mackinnon joined in, still with those faint remains of a grin, as if he found Auburn no end of a good joke. "Used to be nine months, but they had to knock off a spell, because——"

"Here we are," said Brown sharply, cutting short his subordinate: but Auburn's own imagination found it not

hard to fill up the gap. The cab was rolling between iron gates, which were at once relocked behind it, and over the cobbles of a wide square yard. All three got out, and Brown took off Auburn's handcuffs, no longer needed: he was inside the precincts of the prison. He looked about him with interest.

Behind lay the iron gates, and beyond them the street with its mire and drizzle of rain, its frowsy shops and constant stream of low life. On either side of the yard rose a block of dwelling-houses, the residence of various jail officials, and between them stood the inner gateway of the jail, having immense doors sheeted with iron, and an embattled front clear-cut against the frowning sky. It dated from the middle of the nineteenth century, but the architect had had an eye to the picturesque—or was it only a vagrant sense of humor? Grim as any robber keep rose up the fortress-front of the jail.

A small wicket gate was thrown open in the middle of the iron portals, and the figure of a man in uniform appeared behind it, framed to the knees. Some sort of formality was gone through by the principal warder. Mackinnon meanwhile stood on guard, and Auburn chafed under his placid surveillance. What did they expect of him? Some wild, mad dash for liberty? At a word he passed the second gateway, to find himself in an inner court of turf, within which rose the irregular mass of the actual prison buildings, of a type of architecture eminently practical and commonplace. What did Auburn see, looking round? Only the sooty rain coming down out of the sooty London sky: the immense line of the second wall, thirty feet high and sloping inwards: the great blocks of prison buildings, pierced with many, many rows of windows, little and narrow and barred. One of those windows belonged to the cell where he was to pass the next five months, day and night, except for an hour's daily exercise in the open air—so-called—under the shadow of that great brick barricade.

Brown had stopped to speak to the porter. Auburn heard the wicket-gate close, not with the hollow clang of imagination, but quickly, lightly, firmly. It was the gate, not of a prison, but of Prison: a gate that never would open again for him till twenty years had come and gone, till vigorous manhood was changed into broken middle age. The odds were, in fact, that he would die behind its bars.

"Nasty mornin'," said Brown to his crony at the gate. "How's the missus to-day?"

"Nicely, thankye. Baby's doin' well too."

"Good job it's all—— Hel-lo!"

Though there were three present, he blew his whistle before he closed with Auburn. Mackinnon was lying on the ground insensible. Auburn had drawn back and set his back against the brickwork: his face was distorted, and there was blood on his mouth. Brown threw himself upon him, to be met with that terrible drive from the shoulder which Auburn had learned at King's. Brown reeled back and stood off a pace or two. "Come," he said, "what's the good? You can't fight us, you know."

"Can't I?"

"Look round you a bit. Is it any good?"

From all directions men in uniform were pouring out into the yard, summoned by that warning whistle. "I shall have to draw my sword on you," said Brown in coaxing tones. "Now don't you be a fool! You'll only make it worse——"

"*Floreat Etona!*" cried Auburn, with a burst of laughter.

Simultaneously they were all on him at once, striking at him with the flat of the sword or with their batons or clubbed sticks. He was unarmed, till one of the smaller men coming in too close gave him his chance, and reckless of the blows that rained on head and shoulders, Auburn caught the man by the wrist, bent his arm back, and twisted the heavy club out of his hand. After that the fight waxed

furious. His height and powerful physique alone would not have enabled him to prolong such a contest, but he was really mad for the time being. If there was any thought in his mind at all beyond the blind lust of fighting, it was a hope, as blind, that one of those blades that were flashing round him might sheathe itself by lucky chance in heart or brain, and so end it all for ever. He was dragged away from the wall and thrown down, fingers locked round his throat, a man's knee on his chest—up again with half a dozen on him at once, his clothes in rags, his stick broken, suffocated, blinded, the blood raining down over his eyes—down once more, and this time not able to rise.

“Good Lord!” said Brown slowly. “*Good Lord!*” He picked himself up, limb by limb, dusting his trouser knees with a hand which shook from the violence of his exertions. “*Good Lord!*” he said once again, as he looked over the field of battle, “who’d ever have thought it?”

“That’s your quiet man!” said Mackinnon, sitting up and rubbing his head: “that’s your fancy prisoners! That’s what comes o’ bein’ deceived by their artfulness!”

“Here’s Barstow with a broken arm, an’ Mackinnon with a broken head, an’ Smith, an’ Hughes, an’ Hewett all cut about like so many wounded soldiers—*good Lord*, I wonder what the Governor’ll say to this little job?”

“I’d like to break ’is ’ead,” said Mackinnon, standing and looking down on his prostrate foe. Auburn lay as dead—his clothes in rags, the blood running from a gash across his forehead. “A taste o’ the cat is what ’e wants, to cool ’is ’eated temper.” But there was a touch of grudging admiration in his tone all the same, and it was with no ungentle hand that he helped to lift the insensible form.

“Best carry him round to the hospital ward direct,” Brown said shortly. “He’ll want a bit of stickin’ plaster, I fancy.”

Thanks to the fact that prison warders fight to overpower

and not to injure, Auburn's hurts proved to consist mainly of bruises, and he was not detained in the infirmary. Later that same day he entered his cell for the first time. He had undergone his medical examination, taken his bath, changed into prison clothes, and received a short and sharp lecture from the Governor (his punishment had to be left to the decision of the Visiting Magistrates): his hair was cropped, in accordance with prison regulations, to one-sixteenth of an inch: and what with that, and the dress, and his bandaged head, there was little enough left of the original Charles Auburn.

His cell was a fair-sized apartment, warm, well ventilated, and scrupulously clean. The small, barred window was not only set so high that he could not look out of it, but filled with ground glass, which made a blank even of the sky. A plank bedstead, measuring six feet by three, stood tilted up on end against the wall. Mattress and blankets were rolled up on the floor beside it. In opposite corners were fixed a couple of brackets, the one bearing a tin mug without a handle and a tin plate, the other a brush and comb, a Bible, and a tooth-brush. A tin washing jug and basin, standing on the floor, and a plain wooden stool completed the furniture. Outside the cell door hung a card, recording the prisoner's number, and the daily tale of marks by which he was to earn—or forfeit—remission of so many days of prison. Given his choice of three religions, Auburn had elected for Dodo's faith in preference to the Roman Catholic or Jewish creed, and the card was therefore not red nor green, but white.

In the door itself, at the level of a man's eye, there was a small round hole filled with talc and covered with a movable iron flap. Through this the prisoner was kept under frequent observation day and night.

Just then Auburn did not care whether he was observed or no. He threw himself down on the floor and lay still. He felt as if every sinew in his body had been cut. His

head throbbed as if hammers were going in his temples, and the taste of blood was in his mouth: his throat was dry, his hands were burning hot. He would have given anything for a drink of water. He could not control his thoughts, and by and by he heard himself beginning to moan aloud, and to utter names—the names of those he loved—mixed with broken sentences. Then the fear of madness came upon him, and he tried to raise himself, leaning on one hand, trembling, and wet with cold dewes of terror.

It was just then that the door was unlocked to admit a visitor. He came in with a hesitating step, as if uncertain of his welcome: a small, brown man in clerical dress, with blue eyes deeply set under dark eyebrows. Hugh Rose, generally known as the Padre, suffered from a chronic infirmity of the flesh: he was—after his own peculiar fashion—an abject coward. Being a faithful disciple of his Master, he was bound to trample this weakness underfoot, and in so doing he was sometimes led far along the path of rash and reckless bravery. He had heard of Auburn's morning exploit, and had determined on the spot that it was his duty to go and see this desperate criminal. It was with much inward shrinking that he whipped himself up to the threshold of Auburn's cell: but as soon as the door was opened he forgot his frailty. He knelt down on the floor and put his arm round Auburn. "Lie back," he said, "my poor fellow, you're ill!"

"Water," said Auburn faintly. Rose filled the tin mug and held it to his lips, but Auburn had only drunk a few drops when he pushed it away and sat up, dizzy and flushed with a sudden heat of fever. "I feel so frightfully sick," he said, putting his hand to his throat. Almost as soon as he spoke a violent spasm of sickness came on him, probably the best thing that could have happened, but a disconcerting experience for one who had never known a day's illness since childhood. It brought his senses and his self-control back, however: he lay back spent, but with clear brain.

"You ought to be in hospital," Rose exclaimed.

"Oh no," Auburn answered languidly. "My own fault, you see. That would be putting a premium on mutiny. Besides, I'm not hurt—only bruised a bit. There's no physical harm done."

Rose laid a finger on the wrist, and was reassured. "Then your malady is of the mind," he said. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm all right now—thanks very much, by the bye."

"What made you go for those men this morning? They are good fellows enough, and it's not their fault that you're here."

"Oh, heavens, no! Do you think I meant to do it?"

"I see—it was a temporary madness. I hope you won't give us any more of it."

"So do I," said Auburn, smiling queerly.

"Nothing will do you any good, except to submit with what patience you may. It is always hard upon the educated men, this system—especially the first months of it. But the pricks won't be unendurable unless you kick against them."

"I haven't got a kick left in me," Auburn said candidly, "really, I haven't!"

"No, you look pretty well worn out. But when you get over this, what is to come? Are you going to be defiant, sullen, moody, giving and getting the maximum of trouble? Or are you going to set yourself to bear, in a manly, uncomplaining spirit, what is, after all, only the consequence of your own crime?"

"My crime? What crime?"

"The crime which has brought you here," Hugh Rose said, staring at him in wonder.

Auburn stared back for a moment, and then laughed outright.

"By Jove, I'd clean forgotten! Of course—I murdered

Sir Charles, didn't I? No wonder you look upon me as a desperate character!"

The queerest cold thrill, like icy water, went down Hugh Rose's spine as he listened to those simple words. The most passionate asservations, the humblest pleadings, would not have had one-tenth part so much weight with this keen and astute student of human nature. He received at that moment an impression which he scouted as ridiculous, but which never lost its first grip on his mind—an impression of cool, unprejudiced, unvindictive innocence, of a man borne down by circumstances, bending his head with stoical calm to the stroke of man's injustice.

"You know best," said Rose after a pause, "what brought you here."

"Do I?" said Auburn, pondering: "then Providence must have a remarkably vague and imperfect knowledge of the reason, that's all I can say."

"And it lies entirely with you to decide how things shall go with you now while you are here."

"I shan't—voluntarily—turn Berserk any more, if that's what you mean. I don't want to lose marks and forfeit my remission."

"But I thought yours was a life-sentence!" Rose exclaimed.

"As witness these armorial bearings." Auburn pointed to the large "L," signifying Lifer, worked on his rough sleeve. "But it means twenty years, doesn't it?"

"You're looking forward to your release?"

"One's life isn't over at fifty-five."

"Quite right," Rose said, calling himself sharply to order. "You could not possibly take up a more sensible line. Now let me give you a word of advice. You're going through the hardest part of your sentence in these next few months: my advice to you is, keep your mind employed. I dare say you have a smattering of two or three languages? Improve and consolidate your knowledge. Learn poetry

by heart: make out an abstract of history, mathematics, what you will—only keep your brain employed. You will not be able to get much out of the library, but use it as far as you can. Nothing will be so beneficial to you as study?"

"You think so, do you?"

"I've seen it exemplified in a hundred cases."

"Good: I'll take your advice. You ought to know if any man does: you've evidently had plenty of experience. I'm going to live through it if I can," Auburn continued, lying flat on his back with his arms clasped behind his head: "if I can. You'll give me a look-in now and then, won't you?"

"As often as possible. Some day, when you are calmer"—Auburn raised his eyebrows: he considered himself tolerably calm—"you will, I hope, let me talk to you of things that may help you to bear your punishment in a better spirit."

"Ah! your trade? I forgot you were a parson. What do you want—to pray with me?"

"Don't you think you might do worse?"

"Rather! It'll be quite exciting—so novel."

"Do you never pray?"

"I'm afraid I don't know any prayers," said Auburn with perfect gravity. "Unfortunately I was never taught to say them at my mother's knee, because she died when I was six weeks old. But you must teach me."

Rose hated flippancy: he stood up, knitting his brows, and moved towards the door. Auburn looked after him with a painful contraction of the forehead and mouth. "Going?" he said.

"I must leave you now: yes."

"Leave me in this hell?—And you're a good man—oh yes: I should do the same myself, of course. I've seen men under the surgeon's knife, and it didn't affect my appetite. . . . Excuse me, I think I'm talking nonsense. Good-bye, and thanks so much for coming!"

"Good-bye," said Rose gravely. "You'll be better in a

little while, you know. It's only what they all have to go through."

"Yes, but——" said Auburn.

XXI.

WHEN Auburn was removed from Hillingdon, there was nothing to keep the Carminows in Hampshire, and the Ferndean household broke up. Grace Trevor had taken herself and Mr. Carminow back to Stanton Mere on the day after the reprieve: Caron rushed off to town: the Carews went yachting in the Mediterranean: and Dodo gathered her courage up to let Roden bring her home.

Courage: for she dreaded that return. The intense suffering of one day threw a shadow over her memories which darkened all the sunshine of nineteen quiet and sunny years. She shrank from the tongues and eyes of the village, their curious interest, their talkative pity. Above all, she was afraid of the ghosts who haunted every step of that familiar ground—her lover with his light swinging tread and merry eyes, and that dead gay child at his side, so incredibly reckless, her own old self.

One cannot live long at such a tension as had racked Dodo on the night of the reprieve. After the relaxation of the strain came a kind of interregnum, during which the spirit that sat in Dodo's soul refused to suffer any more. She ate and slept and talked and went about her life at Ferndean with a coolness that perplexed all, except perhaps Roden and Violet. But the reckoning day waited for her at Stanton Mere: there, as she dimly knew, she would have to take account of herself, to review her strength, and work out the problem of her future.

She was already beginning to do so when she stepped from the train at Amesbury, and smelt the damp breath of

the wintry moorland air. Bernard was waiting with the dogcart, and she was soon whirling across the Plain, past the very place where she had first seen Auburn, that June evening so long ago. Mr. Carminow was at the door, anxious and saddened. "It's all right," said Dodo, trying to laugh as he kissed her, "my hair hasn't turned white, darling—not even in a single night!" In the dining-room there was a big fire burning on the hearth and a cold supper laid out on the table, which was trimmed with a few purple asters, extremely winter-starved, stuck by Aline in a couple of squat red vases. They sat down to supper, Dodo's quick eyes taking in every detail of the dusty furniture, the dingy silver, the tough beef-steak which Mr. Carminow could not eat, the nameless sediment ingrained at the bottom of fastidious Roden's tumbler. They were all very gentle to her: all, that is, except Roden, who was fractious, and clamored to know why no woman could ever cut a decent slice of bread, for which she was grateful to him: it was dreadful to have even Bernard pitying her! Conscious that she had of late piped but melancholy music to her patient family, she made a good supper, and talked and laughed over it: and was rewarded for her pains by seeing the light come back to Mr. Carminow's worn face, and the curve of humor to his lips. "Heart-broken people," said Dodo to herself, "are tiresome inmates. I must mend my ways; it is too bad of me to plunge us all in mourning for a mere acquaintance!" This was a deliberate exaggeration, but had some truth in it: no use crying over spilt milk!

At last it was bedtime, and Mr. Carminow ordered her upstairs to get a good night's rest. Roden, tired and yawning, went off at the same time, and they stood together on the landing for a moment while he lit his candle from hers. "Good-night, old boy," said Dodo.

"Good-night, dear," said Roden.

He put his arm round her and kissed her, and she saw

that his eyes were wet. "Oh, Roddy, don't!" said Dodo, startled. "I'm all right, really!"

"I was thinking of Auburn just then," said Roden.

Dodo was wondering, as she went into her room, how it was that Roden always said what she wanted some one to say. She locked the door, set her candle on the dressing-table, and looked about her. Unchanged! No change could have seemed so strange as to find it unchanged: the same quiet, fresh, shabby little room that she had passed so many quiet nights in. There were her second-best brushes on the dressing-table, her old slippers under a chair, a score of trifles that made the days before sorrow came as close as yesterday, and—saddest of all!—the very book that she had taken with her to Cæsar's Camp lying where she had thrown it, with a sprig of heather thrust in to keep the place of the most beautiful of modern love songs:

"Awake to be loved, my heart, awake, awake . . ."

Heather that Auburn had picked for her! She closed the book on all its memories and thrust it away at the back of the bookcase, decently hidden as dead things should be. That done, she unlocked her portmanteau, took from it a square of unframed canvas, and sat down on the broad sill beside the open casement to look at Roland Carew's parting present, and to take counsel with her heart.

Dodo's window gave over the valley, spangled near at hand with the lights of the village, but reaching out beyond into the dark distances of the Plain. It was mild weather, and the wind blew in upon her in warm gusts, sweet with the breath of rain. Night had fallen on the Plain: a night of great clouds, lying in dark and grey strands alternate as the moon fled through them, now quenched, now bright as a pearl, now working through ripples of wrack that gleamed like a pale surf crawling up a dark beach. By that inconstant light Dodo looked long at Roland's brilliant canvas. It was a portrait of Auburn, painted in Italy for love, and rather against Auburn's will, by Farquhar,

youngest of Academicians, in the days when he still jeered at the Academy, and the Academy at him. He had foregathered with Roland and Auburn on a tramp in quest of adventure, and had pleaded a dozen times for leave to record Auburn's swarthy features and indefinable look of the half-civilized gipsy, but vainly, till one of Auburn's fits of immovable laziness gave him his chance: and the result was a singularly vivid piece of work, full of humor and animation, half sleepy, half reckless, wholly insincere. It took Dodo's breath away. "So it's you!" she thought.

She held the portrait at arm's length. "You! yes, you, in your weakness and in your strength. So handsome, and so very unmistakably idle and rich, in spite of that soft shirt and that Latin Quarter silk scarf which you think suits you so well! Vain—they call us vain: I wonder how long you spent over that bow, sir? Ah! it's rather a change from silk scarves and Italy to stitching mail-bags in a mustard-colored jacket—to the plank bedstead where you're lying at this moment, with a Government blanket to cover you, and a warder taking peeps at you periodically to see that you don't hang yourself from the window-bars. Oh! my darling, I wish I could go to you, for I know you want me."

Dodo's twenty blithe springs had made but a scanty preparation for a love like this. It had not altered, but it had ripened her. Intellectually, Dodo had matured early: in her teens she had acquired a keenness, and with it that touch of hardness which seems to be the inseparable accident of intelligent youth. To her own people and to Grace Trevor she had always given a deep affection, but for the rest of the world her temper, under its surface amiability, had been too readily amused to be altogether kind. Now the old irresponsibly happy acceptance of life was gone forever, and with it the old touch of pitilessness: she could not go on laughing at the world since she had seen its wounds. Never again would there rise to her lips that cry of the

young, "Such things don't happen," for she knew now that nothing is too cruel to happen, and no cruelty too hard to be borne.

There was one part of her old life that passed the bounds of her toleration, and that was the first day of her engagement. The memory of that evening in the Blandfords' garden long retained power to make Dodo's face contract and her hands clench themselves in the bitterness of strong pain and indignation. To have had such an hour, and to have thrown it away! She had hurt Auburn, too: she had cut deeper than his self-love, deeper than his pride. Weak or strong, frank or insincere, at least he had not tried to bargain with her. "I do love you." She remembered the very tones of his voice, stumbling in unaccustomed nervousness. "I'll tell you anything you want to know." He had laid his life with all its reticences, his love in all its bare strength, in her hands freely: and she, in the recklessness of youth, sure of worlds and time enough, and afraid of her own heart—she had put him away with a laugh. "And that will come back to him," she said to herself, "and he'll think that was the real Dodo." Death itself can hardly make us long more to live our lives over again, than does separation.

But it was only now and then that Dodo gave a cursory saddened glance to the wreck of her own life. That lay all plain before her: no pleasant prospect, but clearly mapped out, and not to be avoided. To guide the house, to harry Aline into orderly ways, to charm away Mr. Carminow's fits of gloom, Caron's petulance, Bernard's sullenness: to take her place in the parish, drill her boys, and carry port wine to her own women: and to do all gaily, to be the light of the house and not an oppression in it—there was her duty, the true woman's duty, trivial but not thankless, inexpressibly weary yet bringing its own reward. All that she could bear, and did, as she sat by the open casement above the lamplit valley, make up her mind to bear fear-

lessly and gallantly: but that was a slight thing, after all. What weighed on her and crushed her was the burden of pity for Auburn: a burden that would never lift, for she never could, day or night, say to herself, "Now he is at rest." Bitter it was to remember that she had not been able to convince him of her constancy. "Other women have said they would not forget, and have forgotten," she said to herself, "but I shall not forget. Forget! Oh, my love, I could as soon forget God as your eyes that night." The memory made her wring her hands together in torment.

She sat looking at the portrait as if it had been a mirror that showed her, by lightning-gleams, the very truth. And so indeed it did: for now she was realizing the things that for some while she had only believed.

"What will you do in prison, Charles? Kill yourself? You're reckless enough. Or die under it? You're weak enough. Live through it and come back to me? Hardly, I think. Bernard might, Roden would: but you've neither Bernard's toughness nor Roden's calm, deep strength. You've lived a self-indulgent life for five-and-thirty years, obeying no law but your own pleasure and your class code of honor, which I dare say was not very inflexible. You're proud, yes: with the kind of pride that prison regulations will break and crumble to atoms. You labor under the impression that you're a democrat, but when it comes to being ordered about by—what do you say? . . . 'those infernal brutes of warders——'

"What will you be like when you come back to me in twenty years' time, grey-haired, and used-up, and old? You think I shall forget: but isn't it you that will have forgotten? That night at Hillingdon you loved me better, I think, than most men ever love a woman: but that was because the whole thing was so tragically worked up, and you yourself were strung to breaking-point with that odd dread of death and greater dread of letting me see it. But in twenty years' time what you will want will be a clear fire,

and a good dinner, and a glass of wine and a cigar. Tell me, Charles, isn't that a true bill?" Auburn's eyes looked somberly into her own. They told her nothing: they would not have told her much had they been his living eyes, for Auburn's face, with all its gay animation, was no index to his thoughts. "Are you angry with me for reading you so hardly? Do I misjudge you? I know you're no coward under a sudden strain, witness that last interview of ours and your coolness on the rack: but have you the reserve of strength, the quiet, undramatic, commonplace courage that one needs to fight through twenty years? Will you break down under it, and let it degrade you? Or will you die in prison?"

"Oh, and while I sit here by the open window and the great bright night, you're stifling in your cell under the warder's spy-hole."

She slipped down on the floor and knelt there, her arms flung out on the sill, her head buried between them. In that moment Dodo knew the meaning of revolt. For he was innocent: not God but man, not justice but law had thrown him into his living grave. "Oh, my God! oh, my God!" Dodo spoke aloud, "am I to see him die, the man Thou gavest me? He's mine, mine, not theirs—mine, and innocent: am I to live on year after year while they break him under their hammer? Oh, if I were free! . . . and shan't I be free, some day?"

Agnes Carminow had been dead twenty years, but her blood was still flowing in the veins of some of her children. The saint and mystic had early reappeared, though under an altered form, in Roden's austere religion: another side of her remarkable character was now to manifest itself in Dodo, by will, by tenacity, above all by a singular intellectual daring. She imagined herself standing alone against all the organized forces of society, and she was not afraid: the mere brute mass of authority, which, as a rule, bears down all individual thought, had small weight with her.

Long she remained kneeling, and when she rose to her feet it was with an altered look. The new thought that had come into her mind was working in her so strongly that every other thought, even grief, even fear, even the harassing preoccupation of pity, had vanished from her eyes. She undressed and got into bed, but she did not go to sleep: the night went by like one hour while she lay thinking out her resolution. At length grey dawn surprised her: somewhere far off in the house a clock chimed the hour: it was six in the morning, and her sleepless eyes were bright and rested.

She slipped from her bed again and went to look out of the window. The sun would not be up for an hour: the morning was cloudy and soft. Winter dew lay thick on the wintry wold. A dim light, so grey that it could hardly be called light, was diffused over the face of the earth under a fell of grey cloud, whose ragged curtains lifted in the east over a gleam of brownish air. How chill it was—how soft and chill! How infinitely far off lay the uplands of the Plain, their wrinkles and ledges softened by a bloom of mist! There was little color in the wide, wintry landscape, and little life except for the ceaseless blowing of the chill and early wind. Dodo threw her window wider open and leaned out, bathing herself in the rush of strong, cold air. If all the world beside was unilluminated, there was light on her face: if the Plain languished in winter there was spring-time in that slight figure, the May of youth, and passion, and courage that no odds can daunt.

“I’ll go on loving the world, Charles,” she breathed, looking northwards to his prison. “You’re still in it.”

XXII.

SENSATIONAL trials crop up from time to time, run through their nine days' wonder, and are forgotten. Years later, glancing over a file of old newspapers, the chance reader recalls the famous details with a reminiscent nod, but the actors, for him, are shadows: the play is played out: the curtain has fallen. It is odds if the reflection so much as once occurs to him that the tragedy of the last act is still going on behind the scenes.

Within a twelvemonth of the Auburn trial Charles Auburn, so far as society was concerned, had ceased to exist. He lived only in the memories of his immediate friends. Ferndean, shut up in charge of a caretaker, bore witness to the unforgetting grief of Roland Carew: a Wiltshire vicarage, a London studio, a cottage in Hampshire, a Plain station under the far Indian sun exchanged tidings of the prisoner, and that was all. The waters had closed over him.

Another year passed, and Roland came back to Ferndean. A man has no right to neglect his tenants for a private sentiment! Caron Carminow wintered in Norway, returned with a portfolio full of etchings, made a hit with an exhibition at Staveley's, and was (courteously) caricatured in *Punch*. The world smiled on him, and it would have been ungracious not to return the compliment. Roden was twice down with fever, and from his letters home, always laconic, Auburn's name gradually dropped out. Eric Blandford decided that old scandals might now be safely ignored, and proposed to Dodo, and shortly afterwards Grace Trevor, for no acknowledgeable reason, had a quarrel

with Mabel Blandford and cut her dead at the Mothers' Meeting. It was suggested in connection with this affair, of which the Blandfords made no secret, that Dodo must still be thinking of her old lover, or she would never have refused so eligible a young man: but few believed it. All agreed that she had acted imprudently: for Mr. Carminow's health was failing fast, and when he died what would Dodo do?

Meanwhile Auburn, having completed his five months' solitary confinement, had been transferred to the great prison which stands up, grey and grim, in the heart of wild Dartmoor. The day which took him down to Princetown was one of wild April storm, and bitter was his disappointment when he found his view of beloved Devon obscured by streams of rain. Even so, however, the journey was a welcome break in the monotony of his daily life.

When Auburn first went to prison, he knew no more of what he should find there than any other man who skims two or three newspapers a day. He was prepared for heavy work, short commons, brutal warders, dirt, and misery. He found a great establishment organized on a military basis, largely cheerful, going by clockwork, and clean as a new pin. It is hardly in man, it certainly is not in the average member of the criminal classes, to live long at the breaking-point of distress, and the large majority of his mates were fairly resigned to their lot. The warders, many of them old soldiers, were as a class just and kindly men, who did what they could to ease the discipline over a jaded temper. The work was not oppressive, and the food was fairly good of its kind: it is true that Auburn was always hungry, and at times would have sold his soul for a pipe, but for these hardships he had to thank his own vigorous physique and the eternal cigars of the past.

In all this there was neither brutality nor severity, but there was much monotony. From *réveillé* at ten minutes past five of a morning till lights-out at eight of a night,

Auburn's day went by routine. Breakfast, chapel, parade, work, dinner, work, supper, bed—so ran the simple programme, in which a good deal of time was devoted to sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care; on winter Sunday nights, indeed, when all lights were out by half-past four in the afternoon, there was nothing for it but to resign oneself to a sleep of thirteen hours. In these circumstances the weekly bath and shave became a sensational event: books, borrowed every Saturday from the prison library, were read from cover to cover ten times over: and when, one day in the quarries, a convict of the rare brutal type ran amok and laid open a warder's head with a hammer, the shock was so startling that Auburn missed all chance of distinguishing himself, and stood staring throughout the agitating ten minutes that followed before Bill Sykes could be disarmed.

It was to the quarries that Auburn was sent, for his physique marked him out for the most exhausting class of labor, and he was glad: better, far better, to tax one's muscles in the open air than to go into the shops as carpenter or bookbinder. Resolved to lose no marks, he threw himself into the work with energy, and soon gained as much approval as was consistent with rigid impartiality. The warders liked the tall quiet man who could be relied on to make a clean job of things, and to give no unnecessary trouble, and to treat them with pleasant respect. Among his mates, also, Auburn won an easy footing when once they were assured that he would neither give himself airs nor try to curry favor by telling tales. Conversation was strictly forbidden. The prohibition was a dead letter. Between practised artists talk went on incessantly under the very noses of the officers, who had learned to be a little blind on this point, since interference was sure to provoke friction and could do no good. Auburn soon picked up this inaudible lip-language, and while he swung his pick-axe heard many a fantastic life-story, many a chapter of

picaresque romance. He did not reciprocate these confidences. His name, however, was known (for at Princetown the prisoner does not sink his identity in a number), and the L. on his sleeve proclaimed him a lifer, while later arrivals contributed details, largely imaginary, of his offense. Its reputed brutality cast an infernal halo round Auburn's dark head; for there is an aristocracy of crime, and among flats and hooks, snide pitchers and magsmen, your uncrowned king is he who has had the narrowest escape of being topped.

Auburn had one point of frequent contact with the non-criminal world in the person of the Reverend Hugh Rose. They had parted with mutual regret upon Auburn's first change of quarters, only to meet again at Princetown, whither Rose, troubled in his lungs by a long residence amid London soot, had achieved an exchange, and there had sprung up between the silent, well-mannered convict and the devoted priest a feeling which under other circumstances would have been called a sincere friendship. Such influence as Auburn had among his mates was always at the chaplain's service, while Rose, coming and going at odd hours and alone, was, though he did not know it, the chief agent in keeping Auburn sane and strong.

Sane: for prison life, despite its freedom from hardships, does produce more than its normal crop of suicide and insanity. Auburn had no right to grumble, and he did not grumble, but it taxed his fortitude, as the years went on, to remain his own master. The monotonous routine, the want of privacy, and the mills of thought grinding in his own brain combined in one steady pressure that went near to bear down the walls of his individuality. He saw himself a convict among convicts, worked, fed, gossiped, stripped, to order. Rose linked him to the time when he had walked a free man.

Rose, and Rose alone: for the same could not be said of Roland Carew, though he did his best. As often as the

prison regulations allowed he came to Dartmoor for half an hour's talk through a wire screen and under the eyes of a warder, but neither he nor Auburn had much satisfaction from these interviews, for Roland, between grief, disgust, and his own peculiar ideas of being tactful, managed as a rule to confound himself and Auburn too. As for Dodo, Auburn had not seen her since the night of the reprieve. He had exchanged letters with her—brief, formal letters written in the light of prison surveillance—and he had heard of her through Roland from time to time. But what's the good of letters, or of news at second-hand? Auburn had hoped against hope that she would come to see him. When she did not come he said to himself, "It is a good thing that she is getting over it," and turned his face to the wall.

June at Stanton Mere: an abrupt, hot June after a chilly May, in the fourth year of Auburn's imprisonment. Evening now, still and fresh: a sky softly quilted over with grey clouds touched by after-sunset light to the coloring of a dove's breast: daisies shutting on the lawn, monthly roses giving out their good country smell in the borders, rooks wrangling in the tops of the tall elms over their beds for the night. From the orchard behind the house came the long, low, tuneless flute-note of a nightingale's song.

Sweet the welcome of this hushed coolness to the wayfarer, as the gate under the chestnuts swung and clicked between him and the dusty road! He came up the drive, looking about him with quick, unfamiliar eyes that observed every change: the loss of a clump of laurels that had died in the last hard winter, the vigorous growth of a mountain ash that had sprung up in their stead. Such were the changes that the years had wrought in Stanton Mere! As he crossed the lawn, however, and ran up the steps to the terrace, he was struck by a greater alteration, in the forlorn aspect of the house, for it seemed to be deserted:

the garden was empty, and many of the windows were closed. He peered into the darkening studio and saw a woman—not Dodo—who stood by the table piling fruit on a dish. "Who is it?" she exclaimed, startled. He did not answer, and Grace Trevor, who was not nervous, walked straight up to him. There was still light enough for her to recognize the slight figure and the thin, fair features.

"Roden! Is it you?"

"Even so."

"You in the flesh?"

"To a reasonable extent. How are you, Gracie?"

He gave her hand a brotherly squeeze, which Grace was too much astonished to return. "Really you!" she said: "why, I was just thinking of you in India and wishing you were home. Dear old Roddy, I—I'm awfully glad! But how did you know?"

"Know what?"

"I mean—" she mended her slip hurriedly—"why didn't you let us know you were coming? It's a perfect thunderclap to have you turn up like this from the Antipodes! Never mind, come in and tell me all about it, and then perhaps I shall begin to believe my eyes."

Roden stepped through the window into the studio, but not the old studio. The air, warm and thick, was that of a place that has been shut up through the heat of the day, and a general aspect of desolation confirmed this view. Dust lay thick on the lid of the piano, and the chairs were pushed about in comfortless disorder. The ferns in pots drooped for want of water: the vases were full of dying flowers, some of which had dropped, showering down their brown petals on the floor. Roden had begun to be seriously uneasy, but Grace, pulling forward a great leathern armchair, gave him no time to ask questions. "What on earth has brought you home in such a tearing hurry? Have you been being seedy again?"

"Rather: I had a third spell of fever, and was packed off

on the spot. A letter would not have got here before me, and as for cabling, I didn't see the force of it: you would only have concluded I was dying."

"And weren't you?"

"Am I dead?"

"Weren't you pretty bad?" He shrugged his shoulders. "How long leave have you got?"

"Why, the fact is, they tell me I'm not to go back: but I shall see to that later on. I'm perfectly fit again; the voyage has pulled me round. Where's——"

"Where's your luggage?"

"Coming on by porter from Amesbury. Wh——"

"Have you had anything to eat?"

Roden's eyes were quizzical, in spite of his anxiety. "My dear girl, you were not born to grace the diplomatic service. Will you tell me what is wrong—is any one ill?"

"Oh! Roddy——"

"My dear girl, I'd rather know."

"Very well, I will tell you," said Grace, sighing. "It's your father. He's very ill."

"Dying?"

"I'm afraid there isn't much hope."

"Any hope at all? . . . Never mind, I didn't mean to distress you. I'm glad I'm here, anyhow. What is it?"

"Pleurisy and double pneumonia. He got wet a fortnight ago driving out of Amesbury."

"Can I go up to him?"

"Not just now. Dr. Minnett is with him."

"Where's Dodo?"

"She's up there too: I'll call her directly I can, but I don't like to interrupt."

"Are the others here?"

"Yes, all of them. Shall I go and find them?"

"No: I'll wait and see Dodo first."

"I'm *very* sorry, Roddy!"

Roden smiled, but his face was painfully drawn. "It's

rather a bad bit of news for a welcome home, but I knew something was wrong before I set foot in the house. I'm glad I'm here: I should like to see him again. Will he know me, do you think?"

"Oh, I expect so. He's quite quiet and not in much pain now: wandering a good deal from time to time, but he generally seems to know Dodo."

Roden was silent for a few moments; but his own thoughts were so sad, and there were so many ravelled ends to be knit up after three years of scanty though regular correspondence, that he soon began again.

"How is Auburn?"

"Quite well, so far as we know. Dodo heard from him in May, and will hear again in August."

"Is he still at Princetown?"

"Yes, working in the quarries. Dodo has been urging him to try and get put on the roads: that sort of job is kept for fourth year men, and she thinks it would do him such a lot of good. He must feel so shut in, boxed up in a beastly quarry."

"How does he write—cheerfully?"

"Oh, always! He never grumbles. Generally he says it's 'very decent,' or 'rather jolly than otherwise.' Once Dodo said it got down to 'quite bearable,' and then she knew he must have been brought very low: but that's the only time. Lately he's been threatening to give up writing altogether, though, because he thinks it stops her forgetting him."

"What a charming state of affairs!" said Roden.

He leaned back in his chair, and let his eyes rove round the studio, so changed from the gay vagabond of a room, spruce though disorderly, which framed his boyhood's memories. "It's a weary business, Gracie. Dear me, what jolly times we used to have in this old room, and how idiotically young we all were! I never had any money, but that was the only care I had in the world; and Dodo was a droll child

too, and as lively as a kitten. Do you remember that Christmas Eve when we were all about sixteen, and got up charades, and you were Mother Hubbard and Dodo was your dog? I suppose a more complacently silly set of youngsters couldn't have been picked out of any house in England. Who would have thought we should turn out so tragically? It was a cruel stroke of luck that sent that fellow down our way."

"I don't see why *you* should be so tragic as all that."

"I know you don't, but I can't escape it. Oh, I'm tired, tired to death, Gracie!" He did look tired: more tired and more spiritless, Grace thought, than was warranted even by three spells of fever and the shock of her bad news. She was not sure enough of her voice to reply, but she laid her hand on his knee, and Roden put his own over it, and smiled up at her, as she stood beside him, with an effort at gaiety. "Dear old girl, I've no business to come and worry you with my troubles."

"I like it, if it does you any good."

"Why, one does get sick of keeping them to oneself. Never mind!" He straightened his shoulders and threw back his head as if he were readjusting himself to an accustomed burden, and went on more lightly. "Upon my word, Miss Trevor, I wonder some one hasn't taken advantage of my absence to carry you off. When are you going to get married, may I ask?"

"You evidently feel it's high time! I think you're rather rude."

"So I am, but I mean well. I was only thinking what a pity it would be if none of those happy-go-lucky children pulled off a good thing. You do it, and break the spell! I should like to see you married, it would be such a joke!"

"I'm glad you think so."

"Although, in point of fact, I should be seriously annoyed if you did get married. I don't want to lose my chum, and we've always been chums, haven't we? Indeed,

I rather think on a previous occasion you promised to marry me."

"When?"

"The exact date has slipped my mind, but I know we were all drinking gingerbeer and eating strawberries on the lawn, preparatory to playing hide and seek, and you chose me as your partner, and we hid behind the cucumber frames, and I kissed you and you kissed me——"

"I didn't!"

"My child, you did—and I said 'Let's get married when we grow up,' and you said, 'Let's, what a jolly lark!'"

"I do remember," said Grace, "but it's a long time ago."

"Half a lifetime," said Roden. "I suppose I was about fourteen. Can you believe that you're the same being now as you were then? I can't."

"I don't think I've altered much."

"Haven't you? I wish I hadn't."

He threw himself back impatiently, and the momentary gleam of mirth faded from his face. "So we come back to our blind alley, don't we? I say, do you think that ass Minett is ever going?"

"Shall I go and see if I can get Dodo out of the room?"

"Do, there's a dear girl. I daren't, for fear of startling her."

Not sorry to escape, Grace ran up to Mr. Carminow's room, but met Dodo on the landing: she had just come out, white and hurried. At first Grace could hardly get her to listen at all: the name of the wanderer secured attention, but no great show of surprise.

"Roddy here? Just arrived from India? Oh, thank heaven! Where is he?"

"In the studio: but oh, Dodo, he does look so ill!"

"I can't think of that now. Do you know where the others are?"

"Where the others are?—oh, you don't mean——?"

"Yes, I do."

"The end?"

"Now, in a few minutes."

Grace wrung her hands. "Oh, my poor Roden!"

"Dear Grace, he'll be thankful to be here. But do you know where the others are? Please think."

"Bernard's in his room, Car and Dickie are in the orchard. I'll tell them, you go to him."

"Thank you dearest," said Dodo, and ran down to the studio. Even at that moment she, like Grace, was startled by the change in Roden, and he by her, for the years had set their mark on Dodo: still only two-and-twenty, she had the graceful slenderness of youth, the smooth unwrinkled skin, and the pale bloom of coloring, but with all the charm of her age she was a woman as well, tired yet fearless, and eminently capable of coping with sickness or pain. She did not need to say many words to Roden.

"Drink this wine before you come up, old boy."

"My dear child——"

"No, you must drink it: you've been ill, and you look deathly tired. Dear Roden, you'll want your strength: you're only just in time."

Roden drank it, chiefly because it was a tradition in the family to obey Dodo, and followed her upstairs, feeling—so rapidly had events gone since his entry—as if he had been home a month. The nurse slipped from the room as the children of the dying man came in, and after a moment Dr. Minett followed her. Mr. Carminow was lying on his back, his head and shoulders supported by pillows: his eyes were closed, and his breath came in short, loud gasps. One hand was thrown out. Dodo laid her own over it and felt how cold it was, and how wet. At her touch he revived for a moment, coming back not all the way but a part of the way from that terrible next world.

"Who's there?" he muttered, in the thick, unfamiliar voice of dying men.

"I—Dodo."

"Are the others with you? It's so dark, I can't see."

"I'm here," said Roden. As he spoke the others came in together. "We're all here, father," Roden added, sure that he was the only one who could control his voice.

"Good boys," said Mr. Carminow, "very good boys, on the whole. Bernie a little hard, now and then—" Bernard was sobbing like a child—"but I generally got my own way with them, my dear." He tried to stroke Dodo's hand. "It's been a long while without you, love."

"It's Dodo, father," said Dodo, unwilling to forego the last word of farewell, for he evidently took her for his wife.

"Oh, Dodo, yes," he murmured, "yes, poor child . . . very hard lines on Dodo. . . . Pink curtains with a green paper? Agnes, Agnes, how could you? . . . Oh, have it your own way, my sweetheart, I didn't mean to be cross."

He had gone back thirty years and was shopping with Agnes Wray. Dear as his children had been to him, the ruling passion was literally strong in death, and his eyes passed over Roden, who would have given much for a word of recognition, and Bernard, whose sore, remorseful heart ached for a word of forgiveness, to look into the sweet smiling eyes of his young wife. Soon his utterance ceased to be intelligible, and his thin artist's fingers began to travel over the sheets: and so night fell, and the tired worker set up his everlasting rest.

XXIII.

JULY was hot that year. Round Auburn even the big forest trees sickened in the dry light, while the lesser shrubs hung down their branches, on which the leaves withered and turned grey. In the garden of Rose Cottage the lilies stood up straight and stiff, each in its own little patch of moist earth, where Lesbia came with her watering-can every evening. Jeannie liked the lilies, and they bloomed for her.

It was half-past eleven, and the sun was in the south. Great faint shapes of cloud, that were hardly more than mist except at the rim, obscured his light and cast a prevailing brassy tinge over the blueness of the sky. There was no wind: the trees, the grass, the cottage itself stood sunburned and colorless in that parched air. Picking beans was hot work, and Lesbia Burnet, bent double over the squat rows, lifted herself up now and then and straightened out her back with a jerk. Lesbia had always been a woman of remarkable appearance, and she was not the less so for the lapse of those long years. Her fine eyes looked out defiantly from under haggard brows: her mouth had hardened, and there were thick streaks of white in her dark hair. When she had picked her basket full she carried it into the spick and span little kitchen where Jeannie lay, dressed in cool print, on an old oaken settle. The younger girl lifted up her head—once handsomer than Lesbia's, though disfigured now by long sickness—with a smile of flashing sweetness, and threw down her book. "Here, I'll do those," she said, catching the basket from Lesbia's hand; "shelling beans is cooler work than reading

Sordello. Is it ever going to rain? That sky coming on top of the chimneys makes me feel faint."

"Yes," said Lesbia, glancing out of the window, "it's hard to be shut between four walls on a day like this. There'll be rain soon, I think," she added.

Jeannie knew well whither her sister's thoughts had flown, but she knew too that Lesbia hated sympathy. She went on with the beans, while Lesbia moved about the kitchen preparing dinner. Presently her restless feet carried the elder woman out into the garden again.

"I'm going to pull a handful of parsley," she said as she went out: but when she had gathered the parsley she stood for some minutes gazing up into the burning, shadowed sky. Her lips moved, her face was wrung with the intensity of her thought. "O God," she prayed, "send the rain, the blessed cool rain, lest Thy servant die in the heat of those nasty little insanitary cells . . ."

The sound of some one coming up the road brought her back to earth and curiosity, for strangers rarely came that way on foot. Here was a fair slip of a girl, dressed in black, and walking with a finished grace and ease which drew Lesbia's eyes like a magnet. She stood leaning on her gate with folded arms, watching, grave and keen, as the new-comer approached.

"Mrs. Burnet?"

"That's my name."

"May I speak to you for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, ma'am—if you've anything to say."

Lesbia continued to lean over the top of the gate, which she had apparently no idea of opening. A cooler welcome could hardly have been extended to a dusty wayfarer: this wayfarer, however, was not to be put off. She said, "I think you remember me."

"Perfectly, ma'am—Miss, I should say. I knew you directly I saw you. You're Miss Carminow."

"You have a good memory."

"I would have known you by the likeness to your brother."

"I didn't know you knew my brother."

"I saw him once, after the trial." Lesbia's face hardened to stone, as it always did upon any reference to that affair. "You're as much like him, miss, as a young lady can be to a man."

This flick of the whip made Dodo smile. She drew back a pace or two and put her hands behind her back, school-girl fashion, looking up at Lesbia with her bright grave eyes. "Mayn't I come in?"

"You'll excuse me, miss, if I say I know my own ways best, and my own business."

"Why are you angry with me?"

"I'm not angry."

"Why won't you let me in then? I want to talk to you about Charles. I've come from Wiltshire to see you. I suppose you and I are the people who love him best in the world——"

"Love!" said Lesbia. Her speaking of the word was like the first flash of the storm. "*Love!*" and the storm began to break: "what do you know about loving a man, miss, a young lady like you? Did you want to be married to him? No, you wanted to be keeping company—a far, far different thing! Marriage goes deep, there's things in it you're much too modest to think of: it's for man and woman, not for young gentleman and lady——"

"But indeed I should have liked very much to marry him," said Dodo, half smiling.

This not being at all the sort of answer that Lesbia had expected, she was disconcerted, and showed it. Dodo followed up her advantage.

"You're cross, I think, because I've never come to see you before. Let me in and I'll tell you all about it, but I can't and won't have it out among the cabbages."

Lesbia shrugged her shoulders and stepped aside from the

wicket-gate. "As you please, miss," she said impatiently, "will you step this way?"

She led Dodo round to the kitchen, and together they entered the presence of the sick girl, whose mocking eyes suggested that she had heard a good deal through the window. "My sister Jean, miss," Lesbia explained, as she set a chair for Dodo. "You'll not think me rude if I go on getting dinner ready. Poor folks must eat, you know——"

"This lady will think you rude, though, if you talk to her in that tone," struck in Jeannie. The musical refinement of her intonation fell pleasantly on Dodo's ear after Lesbia's rich but harsh contralto. "You'll bear with her: she's not very used to company, and she's had much of late to sour her temper—God pardon her, it wasn't ever very sweet!"

"Oh, I'll forgive her," said Dodo, "she means well."

She sat down and looked about her. Half sad, half sweet, and piercingly keen was the sense of intimacy with Auburn that came upon her in this trim kitchen, so vividly colored by red of tiles, white of curtains and blackness of oaken beams. Details of Lesbia's evidence at the trial came back to her mind. Here Auburn had appeared, fresh from his quarrel with Sir Charles, on that eventful night: Jeannie's oaken settle had been his bed, Lesbia's snowy deal his table in the next morning's sunlight. Moreover, the room had known him as child and boy, in every mood: it was penetrated by memories of his vigorous life. At length Dodo roused herself, to find Lesbia regarding her with eyes a shade less hostile, for the meaning of that silence had not been overlooked.

"See now, Lesbia: I've been wanting to come and talk to you for a long while, but I was not free so long as my father was alive. He needed me, and I owed him a duty. He died in June——" Dodo said it steadily, but with an effort; she could not grow used to the truth—"and since

then we have had all the bother of turning out of the Vicarage and settling our affairs. This is my first free day. I want to talk to you frankly, but you must meet me in the same spirit: if you aren't going to believe me, it is no good."

"Let her alone," said Jeannie mischievously: "she sees she was wrong, but she'll never own it."

"All right," said Dodo. Lesbia, who was thrown out by this droll amiability, stirred her pot in a hard silence. "As I tell you, we're all turning out of the Vicarage. My brothers are scattered: they don't want me—at least, they don't need me. I have no binding ties now, except the one: and I have made up my mind to go and live near Charles."

"Near——?"

"Near Charles: near Princetown."

Lesbia turned round, and the lid of her saucepan rolled on the floor with a clatter. "Near Mr. Charles?" she echoed. "You?"

"Quite near him."

"What for, in the name of goodness?"

"What for? why, surely it's a very natural feeling?"

An inaudible muttering was all the answer Lesbia gave. Jeannie's interpretation threw not the most charitable light upon it.

"Don't you mind her—she's only vexed she didn't think of it herself. It's a beautiful idea, and truly poetic!"

"Dartmoor is very fine, you know," Dodo explained. "It is lovely country, and the air's a tonic. Artists go there to paint a good deal. My idea was to rent a small house within reach of Princetown, and I thought very possibly you would come down and join forces with me."

"I wish," Lesbia said, "somebody would tell me whether I'm standing on my heels or my head!"

She sat down on a wooden chair and looked earnestly at Dodo. "What is it you have in your mind, child? Is it Ruth's words you're thinking of?"

"Perhaps it is. 'Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.' I'm afraid, you know, he won't live to come out."

"He's strong enough!" Lesbia exclaimed.

"Yes, he's very strong physically."

"They don't starve, nor yet mishandle them."

"No. But confinement is trying when you're not used to it. Besides, the uniform diet comes hard on a man like Charles, tall and healthy and hungry. It is all very well for a sickly city-bred thief, but for an athletic man who has fared sumptuously all his life it is systematic under-feeding."

A heavy sigh was Lesbia's only comment.

"So that I don't suppose he is as strong as when he went in," said Dodo steadily. "There's the heat too. Charles can't stand heat. Think what those cells must be like, in this weather!"

"You've thought of all that too, have you?"

"Do you think Charles would have given all he did give to a woman who didn't care for him?"

"There's no end to the fool a man will be when he's in love. You're pretty."

"Ah! very," said Jeannie, throwing out her hand. Dodo held it.

"I'm not so pretty as plenty of other women he must have known. I wasn't rich: I wasn't well dressed. No: he liked me because he knew—that is, I don't think he realized it himself, but something in him knew—that there was in me something strong and durable, which he could rely on. Lesbia, I will not let him die in prison."

"You harp so on dying," Lesbia said fretfully, "but it'll take more than heat and under-feeding to kill my boy."

"Yes," said Jeannie, "heat of anger and hunger of heart, loneliness and wakeful nights, shame and insults and degradation, and nothing to look forward to but the grave

or middle age—it'll take all that to kill your boy, Lesbia, and he's got it."

"No degradation."

"Not for one of our class: but is there none for a gentleman?"

"No," said Dodo, white and dauntless. "You can't degrade an innocent man."

"Maybe not; but you can make him feel degraded, and that to the very dust."

"Quiet, Jeannie," said Lesbia roughly. "The child is right, and long I've known it. Yet I don't think he'll die." She bent her deep eyes on Dodo, and shook her head. "He's got too good stuff in him to die—my boy."

"Oh, he won't die of a broken heart," said Dodo scornfully. "That's not the way. But when your constitution's thoroughly lowered, and your hold on life is weak, you catch a cold or you get an indigestion, and it kills you."

"And if he were to die," Lesbia asked pertinently, "what good would it do to him to have you living in a cottage half a mile away? You couldn't see him."

"Why not? Any one walking along the high road can see the convicts in the quarries or on the farm."

"But what good would that do to the pair of you?"

"Charles will like to know I'm near."

"H'm: Charles is not just a fool, my dear."

"Lesbia thinks you're not giving her the bottom of your sack," Jeannie pointed out. Dodo threw back her head and looked from one to the other with cool unreadable eyes.

"I haven't any home, and I want to be near Charles," she said steadily. "There's nothing very queer in that, so far as I can see. At all events, I'm going whether you two come or not—the only question is, will you come?"

Twice Lesbia unclosed her lips to speak, and twice she closed them. At length she said slowly, "I don't know what you mean, and what's more I don't want to know."

You've got some maggot in your head, I suppose: mind it don't grow to a serpent, to turn and sting you. Now let's hear more about this notion of yours. Where's the money to come from? I'm not a rich woman. I've got a bit put by, and I earn a bit more by taking in washing, and so we make both ends meet, but then I pay no rent—this house is my own. I doubt I couldn't get much washing to do on Dartmoor. I couldn't pay my way, and I never heard you had much."

"I have plenty," said Dodo.

She waited a moment. "When Charles thought he was going to die, he made his will. Auburn of course had to go to the next of kin, and the Auburn money with it: but there was a good deal that had been Lady Auburn's, and this came into his power. He left it all to me. Later, after the reprieve, he destroyed the will and drew up a deed of gift instead, so that the money is mine absolutely. Hitherto I haven't touched it, but now I shall take it and use it. The boys—I mean my brothers—will make a fuss, but Mr. Carew will back me up, he's dying to get it off his hands. It will amply cover our expenses."

"But, you little thing," Lesbia said, between vexation and humor, "I can't live on you!"

"Why not? You're coming with me at my request. Surely you and I ought not to let ourselves be troubled by scruples of that kind?"

"No, no," said Lesbia, "I've never eaten the bread of charity yet, and I'm over old to begin. I doubt my stomach's not strong enough to keep it down. If I come, I'll earn my keep. What'll you pay your servant?"

"I didn't mean to have a servant."

"No servant!"

"No: I thought we could manage for ourselves."

"Good: that settles it," said Lesbia after a short pause. "I'll be—what do you call it?—cook-general for you, and that'll cover my board and lodging. There's Jeannie to be

fixed up now, though," she added, with a short laugh. "What'll you do to earn your dinner, Jean—mend the clothes?"

Jeannie sat up with her hands clasped round her knees, the greenish tint predominating in her curiously shot hazel eyes. Most of those who knew the sisters—Auburn himself included—looked on Jeannie as a frailer copy of her eccentric senior: but they were wrong. Lesbia acted much on impulse, Jeannie rarely: Lesbia's judgment was often colored by her passions, Jeannie was deficient in passion but dowered with a slightly inhuman critical faculty, which made her dry ridicule quite as hard to bear—for one who felt it—as Lesbia's ireful storms. There was more than a dash of mockery in the glance that dwelt on Dodo's tranquil face.

"I shall think my dinner handsomely earned by coming near the place," she said coolly. "A madder scheme I never heard of: but it's ill preaching to those whose minds are made up. If you two ladies are set to go, I suppose I must make up my mind to tramp after you: but mind, don't say I didn't warn you! There's such a thing as letting ill alone lest you make it worse."

"Don't I know that? It's a thing people are very good at doing."

"You'll never meet with one that loves him better than Mr. Carew."

"Mr. Carew? I am sick of Mr. Carew!" Dodo broke out. "Oh, he loved him, yes—in his honest conventional way. I do believe this business has half spoiled his life. But he has a profound reverence for constitutional authority. If the law calls you guilty, guilty you are: and if the law were to stretch a cord across your path he'd think it nothing less than impiety if you were to dive under it and——"

"Hush, now!" Lesbia lifted her hand. "Don't you say one syllable more, child, of that sort of thing or——"

“Or what?”

“Or,” supplemented Jeannie the mischievous, “Lesbia won’t be able to come with you to Dartmoor!”

XXIV.

THE mountain railway that crawls, a noble feat of engineering, upward inch by inch from low-lying Yelverton to the intractable moor-fortress of Princetown, calls on its way at Horraford Road; and there, one evening late in August, Dodo Carminow, Lesbia Burnet, and Jean Armstrong descended from the train.

There was no cab to be had, but after some trouble Dodo beat up a carter going their way who would take Jeannie and the luggage, and with that they had to be content. The road wound away uphill, the cart jogged on soberly, its wheels creaking over the ruts, and Jeannie, tired out by her journey, sat in a corner half asleep: the carter walked beside his horse, whistling some tuneless jingle to which the brass ornaments on the harness tinkled an accompaniment. Lesbia and Dodo trudged along, side by side, through the gathering dusk.

Soon they came out upon the open moor. It was a warm night, because overcast, and through a lattice-work of dark cloud the great arch of the west still glowed like a furnace, throwing not a light, but a redness of shadow, over the dark ocean of the tors. Like waves they rose up: heathenishly old they looked, yet unrepentful in their age, although each rushing ascent was topped with such a castellation of granite as should have served to keep all dead gods buried. There was enough wind to make a sound of moaning in the air. At length the tired travelers came upon the lights of a hamlet sparkling out of a rift in the moor below them: this was Menva, stranded in the heart of Dartmoor, midway between Horraford and Princetown. A side-road,

steep and stony, branched off past a few scattered cottages and a tiny Dissenting chapel, over a bridge where brawled, loudly musical in the evening quiet, a rushing and clear brook out of the hills, and thence upward again along a straggling village street, till at length the cart pulled up before a wicket-gate and their guide turned to Lesbia, pointing with his whip, "There you be, my dear," said he.

While Lesbia looked to Jeannie, Dodo walked up the path between thickets of lavender, which she could smell though she could not see them, and let herself in. She had arranged with a woman from Menval to light a fire and take in provisions, but Mrs. Lee had gone home, and Heather Cottage was empty and dark. Having never seen it but once, Dodo made haste to light a lamp in the hall and to survey her small domain. The late tenants, an artist and his wife named Carpenter, had built the place for a sketching retreat and got tired of it, and Dodo had taken it over as it stood, with all its quaint, irritating furniture: ingle-nook hearths where most of the fire's heat went up the great shaft of the chimney, a Dutch dresser in the prim parlor, and grandfathers' clocks in every room. A fat Eve toyed with a lean Adam on the kitchen door: both gave a remarkable impression of impropriety, and also, truth to tell, of bad drawing. Dodo could not but wonder what would be Lesbia's verdict on Mr. Carpenter's conscientious nudes.

Front parlor, back parlor, kitchen—so much for the ground floor: Dodo ran upstairs. The large room over the front parlor, with space for two beds if necessary, was to be for Lesbia, the smaller one behind it for herself: the third, then, must be Jeannie's room. It looked southwards over Cornwall, where far off, low and bright in a gap of the hills, one could distinguish the light of Eddystone Lighthouse winking dimly through the dusk. Far other was the prospect from Dodo's own chamber. Northwards the hills lay huddled, peak behind peak, and the clouds that were bowed over them caught a faint gloom from the windows of

Princetown Prison, barely a mile away. Dodo threw open her casement and leaned out, bathing herself in the night wind as once before in the wind of early dawn. The years that had seemed so long in the looking forward had slipped away fast, and her probation was over: she was free to do as she would with her own life. "God keep you, my darling," she said. "I can't realize that you're really there, Charles, reading in your cell by one of those lights, barely a mile away. God help us both, and give me courage to go on. Ah! my lover, if you only knew——"

For Auburn did not know: nor did any one else outside Dodo's own small immediate circle. When she turned her back on Stanton Mere for ever, she contrived to leave behind her an impression that she was going to stay with her brother for the present, and that her plans for the future were unfixed. She gave no other address than that of Roden's tiny flat in town. Grace Trevor, vexed, troubled, but loyal, was her sole confidante. The rest of Stanton Mere had never taken much interest in Dodo, and was, moreover, busy with the advent of a young and unmarried parson in Mr. Carminow's place.

Dodo had, in fact, made Roden's flat her headquarters for a week or two, while she clinched the bargain with the artistic Carpenters and completed her arrangements with Lesbia. That done, she left him—sorely against his will: and thenceforward Dodo Carminow ceased to exist, and Dorothea Chaston came into being. Chaston was her own second Christian name. "I think I'm rather too much of a public character," she explained to her protesting family. "My photograph was in all the halfpenny papers, you know, and most of the penny ones. Some one at Princetown would be sure to have heard of me if I came on the scene in my own person: and I do not think it is nice for a modest young woman to figure so prominently in the glare of notoriety." There was wisdom in this, as they were all driven grudgingly to admit: if she must needs go off on a

wild-goose-chase, it was as well that she should drop her old individuality. Her position if she were recognized would be hard.

A wild-goose-chase was, however, too mild a term to be used till all other resources of language had failed. Idiocy; raving madness; criminal folly: these were Bernard's words. Caron, less militant, contented himself with calling her a sentimental baby. Even Dickie thought her action rather rot: while Roden, saying little and looking less, was the hardest to cope with of all. The others resented her whim only because it was a whim, eccentric, silly, and expensive, and because the carrying out of it involved the acceptance of Auburn's money, which stung their pride: but what Roden thought Dodo could not tell. She had at this time little clue to Roden's thoughts.

For Roden was changed. When they came out of the first preoccupation of sorrow, they all saw it: and the change went deeper than Indian suns or even Indian fever ought to have gone. Those might account for the fact that he was pale and thin, and that the inveterate talker was given to fits of silence, and the sweetest temper in the family to fits of irritation: but they would not cover his permanent languid want of interest in every one and everything, his own career included. Even the news that he was appointed to an excellent billet in the War Office only drew from him the remark that he had a good mind to chuck the whole thing and get out of it. Clear-eyed Grace observed all this and spoke of it to Dodo. "I think," she said, "Roddy has some trouble in his life that neither you nor I know anything about. Perhaps it is a woman."

"I've thought the same thing," said Dodo gravely: and then the subject dropped, for there was nothing to be done. Roden was in no mood to be questioned, and least of all by Dodo. It is a trite observation that the wall of shyness rises highest between those who love each other most dearly: and Dickie, who was stupid, or Bernard, who was genu-

inely uninterested, had more of Roden's confidence at this time than his sister. Dodo grieved over this alienation.

Yet it had, for her, its advantages. The old Roden would have been far harder to deal with. Even as it was, she did not breathe freely till she was in the train for the south: she dreaded up to the last moment the piercing keenness of Roden's eyes and the quick cut and thrust of hard speech that could not be parried. But, whatever his thoughts might have been, he had said nothing, unless his closing words were to be taken as a warning: "Mind you don't get into mischief. Who breaks, doesn't always pay."

Dodo did not mean to have any breakages. Just as she had contrived to leave Stanton Mere happy in ignorance of her movements, so she made her appearance at Menval without giving grounds for gossip. She paid her rent in advance, and used Sir George Trevor's name as a reference. She was the daughter of a country clergyman, for whose death she was in mourning: her home had been broken up, and her brothers were scattered: she was a trifle run down, and thought it would do her good to live for a while in the bracing air of Dartmoor. If she liked the place, she might stay on for some months, while she was looking about her. By way of chaperon she was bringing a very superior sort of maid—an old family servant, who was very much attached. She meant to be out all day on the moors, walking, riding, sketching, leading the simple life. "It was very lonely?" Oh! that was nothing to her—she could not go into formal society during her mourning, she did not want to do so: if the vicar's wife, the doctor's wife, and the governor's wife would call upon her she would be fully content. All these details did Dodo contrive to let fall or imply in the course of her single interview with Mr. Carpenter, who, having no reason to think of doubting them, not only gave them currency in the neighborhood, but stamped them with the sanction of his own incurious trust. Thus the surprise of her arrival was discounted beforehand, and all the ques-

tions were answered which might have gone buzzing round that slight, curly-haired figure.

When Dodo reached Menval, she was in hourly expectation of her quarterly letter from Auburn. That it was already overdue she explained by the fact that it would have to go to Roden first. Next day she went to meet the postman, but he brought her only a sheet from Grace. She came back and found Lesbia, silent and grim, cleaning the house down to assert her contempt for the dirty ways of all artist folk, while Jeannie lay on three chairs in the dismantled kitchen and jeered at her. Dodo, clad in a summer black muslin and an exquisite little straw hat with a French-sweeping plume, paused on the threshold.

"Lesbia."

"Well?"

"Can I do any messages for you in Princetown?"

Lesbia halted, leaning on her broom. "Are you going up to Princetown?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To get some shoe-laces."

"I can spare you the walk," said Jeannie. "I have some."

"Quiet, Jean!" said Lesbia angrily. "No, I don't want anything." She added after a moment, "Maybe I'll walk up myself some time this evening."

It was a glorious day and a glorious scene: the air, warm yet nimble, bathing in a blue glow all those leagues of fiery gorse and wine-dark heather, while the rock-battlemented tors rose up barrenly defined against the azure, and in the swarded rifts between them shallow watercourses lay spread out in patches of dampness that glittered like sun-smitten steel. For all Dodo cared, it might have been Clapham Common on a rainy day. She had acquired of late the habit of intense, abstracted thought, which deadens observation. At length, however, she gained the high road, and the im-

mediate scenery grew less wild: scattered cottages, each with its patch of cultivated ground, rose by the wayside. Skirting the border of a wooded hill, she came on a village that lay off along a road to the right, and in the midst of which rose up, like some great factory, an immense block of drab buildings enclosed in a high wall. It was Princetown Prison.

Imagination is a weak thing. It needed that grey hell, those rows of barred windows, to bring home to Dodo the horror of prison life. She had trained herself to believe that under modern civilization prison life has no horror, but the sight of that ugly unfeatured place, where nearly a thousand prisoners were packed together, undeceived her. Nowadays, indeed, chains and the lash play no part in the life of the average prisoner, but in their stead men suffer unutterable tedium and monotony and mournful degradation, so that an attempt at suicide is no rare thing in any great convict establishment. "And Charles so keen on yachting!" was the thought that darted into Dodo's mind, bringing the saddest of smiles to her lips. She could feel the passions and the miseries of the place striking out across the sunlit air, and blackening it.

There lay the prison, and there, in the fields of the home farm below, Dodo had her first sight of the prisoners themselves. They were making hay, the late hay crop of Dartmoor, at no great distance from the road, and Dodo placed herself beside a couple of sightseers from the village, who were leaning over the stone coping of the highway to watch them: small figures of men in drab jackets and breeches and queer conical caps, toiling slowly and mechanically under the surveillance of warders mounted or afoot, armed with bayonets or rifles. Work is a good and honorable thing so long as it is free, but these men were not free, and their forced and languid labor added the last bitterness of dreariness to the dreary scene. The sightseers from Princetown found it full of interest.

"Uncle, what are those funny little things like pepper-boxes?" asked the younger of the two, nodding towards the prison wall.

"Look-out places, my dear, where the civil guard are on duty in case any o' those beauties should take it into their 'eads to cut and run."

"But do they ever?"

"Oftener than what you'd think for, especially in the autumn when the fogs are on. I don't know what they expect to get by it more than a bullet in their legs."

"Don't they ever get away? How stupid of them to go on trying! What's the punishment for trying to escape?"

"Bread and water and the lock-up, and a kind of clothes like a clown at a pantymine: they used to get a floggin', but that's near done away with now—more's the pity! We're too tender with 'em by 'arf, seems to me."

"Do they all work on the farm?"

"Bless you, no! lots of 'em work in the shops—indoor work, that is; and some are put to reclaimin' the bog-land, or road-makin', but that's only the good-conduc' men. Lots of 'em work in the quarries, too. See there, down the road, that 'igh wall? inside there's the quarries." It was in the quarries that Auburn, so far as Dodo knew, was at work. "They've dug an 'ole under the road now so's they can get to the quarries without people starin' at 'em. Oh, they're uncommon tender with 'em, they are—a lot o' brutes like that! If I 'ad my way——"

"You wouldn't hurt a fly, uncle," declared the girl prettily. She slipped her hand through his arm. "Let's go back to the hotel, I don't like being so near them."

She drew him away, and Dodo was left alone in the blinding sunlight. A little way off there was a place where the road on either side was screened by a dense coppice, and Dodo plunged into it, forcing her way through the hazels and hollies till she was free from observation: and there, if it had been to save her own life or Auburn's, she could

not have held back the fit of strong crying that came on her. She sat down on a fallen trunk and hid her face in her handkerchief, afraid that her sobs would be heard from the road, weeping as she had not wept since the night of the reprieve—convulsed, disfigured, suffocating. Her agony—it was no less—endured some ten minutes and left her tired and cold.

Dodo's tears were not of the kind that sap resolution. When she had mastered herself and drawn down her black veil she slipped back to the road, passed the quarries without a second glance (strange as it was to think that Auburn was probably within earshot), and went on by the great wall of the prison itself and the gateway overspanned by so wise a motto: *PARCERE SUBJECTIS*. In the thick summer dust she saw the print of many prisoners' feet, each stamped with the broad arrow, and knew that one of those footmarks showed where her lover had trod. A little farther on she came to the church, enclosed in its own God's-acre, and went into the churchyard for a sight of the graves. On one side lay the honored dead, their names preserved on cross or headstone for the love of those to whom they had been dear: weak and vain effort of man to struggle against the iniquity of oblivion! On the other side lay the dishonored dead. No doubt they slept as quietly, but for them, even in this place of universal amnesty, there was in the majority of cases no cross in token of forgiveness, no name, no date. There they lay in the sunshine, in rows of nameless mounds, and the grass flourished over them, and the wind made music from it: dust returning to dust, unregretted and unremembered. It was in this terrible churchyard that Dodo woke from her overwhelming oppression of pain to a tenfold hardened strength of purpose. "Innocent men don't live twenty years in those quarries," she said to herself. "If he is left in prison he'll die, and they'll bury him under one of those mounds, and he and his memory will perish here together. He shall not die in prison."

"Lesbia, where are you? Has my letter come?"

Lesbia had gone upstairs to tidy herself, after her energetic spring-cleaning. She came into the kitchen now, and picked up Dodo's hat, and veil, and gloves, which were thrown chanceably on different chairs. "I wish you wouldn't be for ever clutterin' up my kitchen with your vanities," she said. "What d'ye want now?"

"Charles' letter. Has it come?"

"No, nor it's not coming: he's forgotten you—or maybe he's ill and can't write."

"Don't you heed her," said Jeannie, coming into the room in time to hear Lesbia's last piece of amiability. "It wants five minutes of one yet, and the second post isn't in till the quarter past. Have you fetched the shoe-laces?"

"What incarnate teases you both are!" said Dodo, sitting down on the window-seat, which looked sideways up the road. "No, Jeanneton, I forgot the laces, and yes, Jeanne-ton, I have been crying. I know you were just going to ask if I hadn't found the dust very trying."

"Crying, my bairn? What for?"

"My first sight of the prison and the convicts. I saw some of them quite close, on their way from the dairy: a whole string walking two and two with warders on guard. I also spent some time in the prison churchyard, and had a talk with Charles' friend, Mr. Rose, the chaplain."

"You talked to him?"

"Certainly, why not? It's proper to talk to a clergyman, even if you haven't been introduced. He's coming to see me soon. It will be good to hear some first-hand news of Charles."

"But you can't ask for him!" Lesbia exclaimed. Dodo laughed at her.

"No," she said, "I can't say, 'Do you know a convict named Charles Auburn?' But I can ask him whether he has any gentleman prisoners, and whether it's true that murderers give less trouble than any other class. Dear

Lesbia, did you ever know a man that didn't like talking shop?"

"It's true: I'd forgotten that the boy's sure to be a marked man," Lesbia admitted. "But what the better will you be for that?"

"Pazienza!" said Dodo: "which is all the Italian I know, and means Patience. I am in no hurry, I'll wait a twelve-month if need be to consolidate my position and get a sure footing among these people."

"What's the man Rose like?"

"Small and brown and trim, with dark blue eyes and black hair and a well-cut suit: a vivid talker, I should imagine. He is High Church, so you must mind your p's and q's, Lesbia: I won't have him frightened off by your heresies. I do want to hear about Charles."

"Well, I wonder if he's worth it!" was Jeannie's comment. "When all's said and done, what is he? Just a man!"

"An innocent man who has had three years of prison,"

"I'll wager it isn't pity you feel," said Lesbia with a short laugh.

She stood by the table and spoke on, bending her dark eyes on Dodo's face. "He's paying for the sins of his father: God knows that's a big bill, but it's up to him to pay it. You and I that loved him, we've got to stand aside and watch him suffer: isn't that it?"

"No," said Dodo.

"No! why, what can we women do for him?"

"Set him free."

"Now you're joking, Miss Dodo."

"Am I?"

"You're never in earnest?"

"I am, as you know very well."

Lesbia had long known it, none the less Dodo's cool frankness took her breath away. "Whiles I've thought you were, and whiles I've thought you couldn't be," she

answered, dropping her voice, though Dodo had spoken in her normal tones. "How long have you been planning this?"

"Since my first night at home after the trial."

"It's midsummer madness. Do you know he may be shot in escaping?"

"Better so than die in prison: it's a quicker death. But I don't intend him to fly in the face of the civil guard, you know."

"What do you intend, then?"

"You'll see when the time comes. I'll tell you this much: the way I mean Charles to escape is the way a man actually did escape, a winter or two ago. What an ill-developed Cockney thief has done, I imagine Charles can do."

"And did the Cockney get away?"

Dodo shook her head.

"There it is, you see! Child, don't you know that in fifty years not one prisoner has ever got away?"

"Dear me, yes! they make a dash for it four or five times in a winter, and now and then one, like my Cockney, dodges the hue and cry for a couple of days, but they never get far because they have no one outside the prison to help them. My Cockney had no friends and no money, and after forty-eight hours on the moor in the bitter winter weather he gave himself up. A man with convict things on, or with nothing on at all, is not likely to get far! That won't be Charles' case."

"You think you could hide him?"

"A twelvemonth, if need were. Not a soul enters this house but you and I and Jeannie. It won't be searched, for there'll be nothing whatever to connect us with the escape."

"But you couldn't keep him here for ever."

"I can till the hue and cry has died down. After that we shall get him away in a closed motor-car; and the next

step will be Mr. Carew's yacht and an island under the line."

"You think Mr. Carew'll help you?"

"You think Mr. Carew will betray us?"

Dodo laughed. "If he knew beforehand he would stop it if he could, but I shan't tell him till it's done. As for handing Charles over to the authorities, he may think it's his duty, but he certainly won't do it. He'll provide the money, too, for of course it will cost a good deal: but he is Charles' trustee, you see, so that through him we can tap Charles' own income. The yacht's crew will consist of him and Charles and Piers Comfrey—it won't be the first time those three have sailed together. The one real difficulty I foresee will be in getting Charles on board, but yachts are privileged creatures, and come and go very unceremoniously. Besides, it will be months after the escape and miles away from it."

"There's one thing more," said Lesbia slowly, "and a pretty big thing too, to my thinking. How d'you make it right with your conscience to break the law of the land? For law-breaking it is, and that goes against my stomach. 'Obey such as are set in authority.'"

"'For the ruler is not a terror to good works, but to the evil,'" Dodo capped the quotation. "But Charles has not done the evil. If he were guilty I would not lift a finger to save him from the gallows. It is because he's innocent that I am free to save him: and save him I will, or die in trying. Oh! his eyes, that last night in prison!" She put her hand over her own eyes, as if she could not bear the memory of Auburn's look. "No, Lesbia, no! Justice is above law."

"Aren't you reckoning without your host?" said Jeannie.

Her low quiet voice struck a fresh note in the argument, and they both turned to her. "How?" said Dodo.

"If he were retaken, you would run the risk of being sent to jail for abetting his escape, to say nothing of a scandal that would ring all over England. I don't know much of

gentlemen, and I'm not fond of the breed, but they have their points, and I think Mr. Auburn is too much of a gentleman to escape at your risk. You may lay your plans, Miss Dorothea—he'll refuse."

"If I gave him twelve hours to think it over in, he'd refuse: I know that. I shall not give him twelve hours, no, nor one. I'll carry him off his feet." Some spark of the old mischief came into Dodo's eyes, the old rather wicked allurements which Auburn indeed never had been and never would be able to withstand. "Ah! you know Charles and you know me, but you don't know me and Charles. He'll repent afterwards—I expect I shall have a lively time of it with him: but he'll come. I can whistle him——"

"Here's the post," said Lesbia.

A moment later Dodo had torn open a covering letter of Roden's and taken from it a sheet of prison paper. The strong, small, irregular writing had grown smaller and blacker than ever, and the odd short lines—Auburn's letters always looked like a copy of verses—zigzagged erratically across the page: terse it was and to the point, as befitted a letter that had to pass under Major Topham's gold-rimmed glasses and through the hands of Hugh Rose.

"PRINCETOWN,"

August 27th.

"MY DEAR DODO,—I am very sorry about Mr. Carminow's death. I was sorry not to be able to write before. He's well quit of it all, but it is hard on you. But I am glad you are leaving Stanton Mere. Roland came here a week ago, who told me he saw you in Town with Roden, looking blooming. That is far better for you. Old scandals die hard in the country, but town memories are short. It will be a new life for you, and you must drop the old one. This is the last letter you will ever get from me.

"It is a silly business: keeps alive, or half alive, what had much better (for both of us) be dead. I shall not write again, and you are not to write to me. If you do, I will

not read your letters. They will be sent back to you unopened. Understand, the thing is done with now, and you are free. I am certain you are full as tired of it as I am, so let us have no more sentimentalizing over the grave, please. You will think me an uncivil brute, but convict life knocks the romance out of one (and the manners) and knocks some common sense in. So good-bye.

“ ’Regards to all—if they care to have them.

“C. A.”

XXV.

DODO locked up that letter in her drawer and spoke of it to no one. It was not the first time that Auburn had struck at her: probably it would not be the last. She knew that what he said was not true, for if it had been he would never have said it. He was far too chivalrous to throw a woman over if he were really tired of her. How she came by this certainty she could not have explained: she had known him not quite two months, and she was persuaded that she read him to the depths of his nature. Why, then, did the letter cut so deep? Partly because it shut her off altogether from communication with Auburn, for she knew him too well to dispute his orders: but chiefly because, though it could not overthrow her certainty of his love, it did shake her confidence in her own power. Unforeseen, it reminded her how frail all plans are that depend for their carrying out on the passivity of a second human will.

No matter for that: even when her heart failed her she never dreamed of turning back. She locked away Auburn's letter and turned to practical affairs. She had come prepared to play a waiting game, to let time slip away like water rather than run a needless risk, and her first care was to consolidate her position. With this end in view she listened gravely to Hugh Rose's sermons (he was a bad preacher), or carried into Menval's wind-swept cottages the practical charity that she had learned in Stanton Mere. She was seen sketching on the moor, her dress trim and suitable, her air composed and merry. Mr. Rose, who was greatly taken with her, sang her praises to Mrs. Topham, and by a judicious use of what he had heard from the

Carpenters about Sir George Trevor, induced that lady to carry her gold card-case to Heather Cottage. Dodo soon found herself adopted into the small circle of Princetown society: the very warder on guard at the prison gateway learned to salute her as she passed. It maddened Dodo to remember that if he was respectful to her Auburn had to be equally respectful to him.

Meanwhile the weeks ran by, and summer ebbed into autumn. Dodo did not grudge this loss of time: she was like a prudent builder, who thinks no time lost that is spent on solidifying his foundations. Now and then she was moved to smile at the disproportion between means and end, but she kept the end steadily in view, and she was too practical to chafe under the day of small things. Hugh Rose's coal-club and Mrs. Topham's card case were among the many slight but significant touches by which Dodo painted in her portrait of a normal young lady without a care in the world.

It was on a late October evening that the tide began to turn.

Dodo had seen Hugh Rose many times during the interval, but her instincts of caution had warned her to go very carefully, and it was not till the night of the Tophams' dinner that she entered into her first intimate conversation with the priest, who thought her a sweet and most intelligent young woman. He no more suspected that their pleasant talk in the conservatory was the bourne towards which Dodo's plans had been converging for the last three months, than he recognized in her the notorious Dorothea Carminow of the Auburn murder trial. He would not have believed it if he had been told so. No mystery hung round Dodo, she was absolutely the typical English girl: it was impossible to conceive of her in any unique or tragic relation. Her foothold, so far, was secure.

In the Tophams' big double drawing-room Major Top-

ham was drinking coffee on the hearth-rug and conversing with the Chichesters of Caire, while Dr. Leigh and Ida Topham turned over a volume of photographs, and Mrs. Topham sat at the piano, handsome and cheery, running through the score of *Véronique* for the benefit of a neighboring vicar and his wife. The doors of the conservatory stood open, so that Dodo and her cavalier were distinctly visible; Dodo slight and elegant in her black gown and airy scarf, Rose bending forward in his deck chair to point his speech with lively movements of the hands. What they said, however, could not be heard through the dashing chords of *Véronique*.

"And don't you find your work awfully trying?" Dodo asked, lifting her great blue eyes to the tired, dark face of the priest.

"I might, if I let myself think about it."

"One feels that it must be so hopeless."

"Why, you see," Rose answered, his features lighting up with his rare, half melancholy smile, "that's the crux of the whole problem. Some think a prison chaplain's life is spent in administering consolation to the penitent and returning sinner."

"Oh, I shouldn't think that!" Dodo exclaimed, with a lively vision of Auburn's mocking eyes.

"Exactly. It isn't. But then others think he has nothing to do but thunder judgment against a set of hardened and brutal ruffians."

Dodo shook her head. "They couldn't all be bad."

"Emphatically not. But I'll tell you what they all are—innocent."

"Do they say so?"

"Not in so many words, but it all depends on the point of view. They don't, in many cases, deny that they committed a crime, but then there were so many excuses to be made for them! Bad companions—bad books—sudden temptation—pressure of poverty—heat of anger—want of

thought—there's no end to the excuses they find! The witnesses were their enemies, of course—that's human nature: the lawyers were bribed—sometimes the judge into the bargain. Miss Chaston, there's a perversion in the criminal mind which renders a man incapable, I do believe, of seeing his sin in its true light. Even the superior ones, the educated men who do profess regret, mix it up with railing at the false friends who misled them and the venial counsel who blackened the case."

"Do you—but perhaps I oughtn't——"

"What? Please finish your sentence."

"I was wondering whether it was against etiquette for me to ask you about the prisoners. I've so often wanted to, but I was afraid of being indiscreet."

Rose smiled. "There can be no indiscretion so long as I don't mention names. We're not supposed to do that, but there's no harm in my talking about the general aspects of my work among them, that is if it interests you. What were you going to say?"

"Do you think any of them are really innocent?"

"No. I don't believe innocent men get sent to prison. People make a lot of fuss about it, but that's all humbug. Of course a case does occur now and then—" he turned his head away and sighed—"but very rarely."

"It is horrible to think of its ever happening, isn't it?" murmured Dodo.

"Horrible," said Rose shortly. "But no human system is or ever could be perfect."

"Ah, that's the man's point of view," laughed Dodo: "you look at the case from its broad, practical aspect. Women, you know, never find it easy to be philosophical."

"Heaven forbid that any man should find it easy to be philosophical! I assure you, I don't."

"You say that as if——!"

"Do I? Ah, it's nonsense, of course: Major Topham would tell me it's my Celtic imagination. But the fact is

I've been to see a man this morning about whom I can't help feeling uncomfortable. I knew him first at Wormwood Scrubs—I was there for some years before I came here—and I've never felt happy about him from the first: and yet I know it's purely fanciful. There can't be anything in it."

"How do you know?"

"I've taken the trouble to look up his case in a file of old reports—it was a very sensational case, you would know the name in a moment if I told you——"

"I don't," said Dodo prudishly, "as a rule, take much interest in sensational trials."

"Ah, no, no! but this was quite exceptional—all England was ringing with it! He was well known in London, and the court was filled with smart people. He was only five-and-thirty, and very well off."

"A gentleman prisoner? I was going to ask you if you had any, and how they got on."

"We have a good many, but he is probably the most notorious of all. It was an atrocious crime, and the case was proved up to the hilt—by circumstantial evidence, of course: but the cane with which the murder was committed was found on the floor of the room and positively identified—I beg your pardon, I am straying into gruesome details!"

"Oh no, it's most interesting. Please go on about the poor man."

"'Poor man!'" Rose echoed, smiling at this instance of a woman's habit of leaping to conclusions. "He is a cowardly murderer, Miss Chaston, and I am a sentimental fool to have any doubt about it—indeed, I haven't. All the same, it is a case to break one's heart. I've never got him to vary from his statement that he is innocent. He doesn't loudly assert it, he simply takes it for granted and expects me to do the same. He's a very gentlemanly fellow, of course, and must have been decidedly good-looking——"

"Does prison life turn people ugly?" Dodo asked, stifling an intolerable spasm.

"Well, naturally, the clothes and the shaven head and all that don't make for beauty. Besides, the work's pretty hard and the fare not luxurious."

"What work is he doing?"

"None at all, just at present. He has been on the sick list for a month or more—" Dodo turned quickly, and bent over a pot of chrysanthemums—"nothing very serious, only a crushed foot. I'm afraid you're feeling the heat, Miss Chaston?"

"No, oh, no! It is so much cooler out here than in the drawing-room," Dodo answered, plying her fan with a languid swinging movement which partly veiled her face. The unsuspecting frankness of Hugh Rose had made her at first feel miserably like a spy, but before this news, so unexpected, her compunction vanished: she could think only of Auburn sick and suffering in the rough hands of warder nurses. "No, really, I don't want to go in: it's far hotter in the drawing-room, and besides I'm interested in what you were saying. Do go on about your poor convict."

"My poor convict? Oh, he's much better: he'll be out of hospital in a day or two. He was working in the quarries, and managed to upset a barrowful of stones over his own legs, but there was not much harm done. I told him I believed he'd done it on purpose."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he only laughed. He's not a malingerer. Some of our gentleman prisoners spend half their time in the infirmary, but he's never been there before. He likes the work, I fancy: anything's better than brooding."

"Does he brood?"

"He doesn't take me into his confidence," Rose answered gravely. "He's not communicative about himself. He's one of the coolest fellows I know, and chaffs me in the most outrageous way without a particle of respect: but for all

that I can't answer for what he's like when he's alone. I try to cheer him up as best I can: but, you know, what *can* one say?"

Rose thrust his hands into his pockets and sat with knitted brows, gloomily turning over this problem in his mind: a hard riddle to answer. Signs of movement were visible within the drawing-room, and Dodo began to draw on her gloves.

"I should like to see him," she said, smoothing down her forefinger with extreme care. "What will he do when he goes back to work—be sent to the quarries again?"

"That I don't know. When I last saw him he was very keen to be drafted off with the road-mending gang, in which case you would have every opportunity of seeing him: but whether he'll get his wish, of course, is more than I can say. I shouldn't wonder if he did: road-mending is reserved for the good-conduct men as a rule, and he, poor fellow, has led an exemplary career, at Princetown at all events. Dear me, I'm afraid I've been talking an unconscionable lot of shop!" said Hugh Rose, smiling down at his little friend. "It was your fault, though: you lured me on with your sympathetic questions! I hope you haven't been bored to death."

"How can you say so?" protested Dodo. "Don't you know that every one is always interested in prison life? I assure you, Mr. Rose, I've been *deeply* absorbed in every word you said, and if your romantic prisoner does get sent out road-mending I shall most certainly go and have a peep at him."

"But you won't know him," Rose pointed out.

"Oh! you'll describe him to me," said Dodo.

XXVI.

THE key grated in the lock, the door opened: Auburn sprang up and laid aside the book—a Spanish grammar—with which he had been grappling. “Ha! Rose, this is good of you. I’ve been wondering whether you ever meant to come near me again. Sit, will you? you look tired.”

“I am tired,” Hugh Rose acknowledged, seating himself on the wooden stool which was all Auburn had to offer him. “I’ve had a long morning, and a hard one.” He sighed and brushed his hand across his forehead with a quick nervous movement that was habitual with him. Auburn laughed, and let himself drop down on the speckless floor of his cell, where he sat with his back to the wall and his long legs extended. He had from the first declined to treat Mr. Rose on any other footing than that of a normal friendship, and the priest, who was the last man in the world to stand on his dignity, had accepted the situation with goodwill. It was between twelve and one o’clock on the morning of a dark November day in the fourth year of Auburn’s imprisonment, and he had just finished his midday meal. His empty dinner-can testified to the soundness of his appetite, for beans and fat bacon are not epicure’s fare.

“What’s the matter?” asked the prisoner sympathetically, “got hold of a hard case?”

“I’m afraid so. The utterly unimpressionable type. And the man’s in on a charge of m——”

“Murder: don’t mind me!” said Auburn gaily. “You’re hypersensitive, my dear fellow. Is it the little rat-faced

man that's just been put into our push? I've observed that he's going to come out on top, though there are half a dozen of us that could put him in our pockets. But the aristocracy of crime doesn't rest on brute force. What's your six-foot bruiser compared with an honorable thief? And, as in the old duelling days, the crowning distinction is to have killed your man. As for me, I've got to sit low to Jimmy Jones. I'm only a tyro—an amateur."

"I wish you wouldn't sit low to him, then. I believe he's a plague-spot of corrupticn. But he's managed to get round Brown, somehow."

"Brown's an ass, and Jimmy is a little beast. I'm sorry to have to say it of him, for he hails from my own part of the world: introduced himself to me as a compatriot, in fact, not to say an old friend. He was in court the day I was sentenced, and improved the occasion—I mention this in confidence—by prigging a wipe under the usher's very nose."

"Prigging a what?"

"Nosewipe, nosewipe," said Auburn patiently: "my dear Rose, what a very verdant Hugh you are—more like a green carnation, in fact. No, don't try to think it out, it'll only give you a headache. So Jimmy's a plague-spot, is he? I can believe it. Shall I knock him down for you sometime?"

"And get yourself into trouble? Certainly not."

"I did it once, and I didn't get into trouble. I heard things going on that were unseemly, so I took my time to interfere. My lord—he was a long-firm man, and had been at Oxford—picked himself up pretty quickly, and said things which I don't think he could have learned even at Oxford, beastly hole though it be." Hugh Rose was a Balliol man. "Robyns came up, heard what he had to say, looked at his black eye and my knuckles, and—told him to get on with his work double quick time. Pretty smart of Robyns, hey? If I hear the same sort of thing going on,

I'll work the same oracle. I have said a word or two already, for which Jimmy glowers at me like a mad ferret. There are one or two even here who don't know absolutely all the foulness there is in the world, and it's a pity to brush the dew off their wings."

"There isn't much that you don't know."

"No, by Jove," agreed Auburn simply. "There are times when I feel as if my mind would like a bath. Come! dismiss Jimmy for the present. I'll say a word in season for you, so don't worry. Isn't it a perfectly foul day? All the same I'm yearning for one o'clock: I want to be at work again. You know they've put me on the roads?"

"So I've heard. Are you glad?"

"Glad!" Auburn threw up his hands. "Glad! Bless the man! Would *you* be glad, do you think, to get a breath of moor air and a glimpse of the hills after being boxed up in the quarries for six months? Yes, I *am* glad, more than glad. I——"

"You what?" asked Rose sharply.

"Nothing. What else have you been doing?"

"What were you going to say?"

"Don't be so damned inquisitive. Ah! I beg your pardon, I forgot your cloth—always do forget it, I don't know why: you're so very unlike the typical parson."

"The conventional parson, don't you mean?" said Rose dryly. He dropped the question of Auburn's broken sentence: he had long found it increasingly hard to wring from Auburn any confession of weakness, bodily or mental, such as he divined to have been on the tip of the prisoner's tongue. "I suspect your acquaintance with parsons is limited."

"Not at all: one of the most charming scamps I ever knew was a parson, and commenced saint in later life. I only knew him in the latter capacity, but I believe he was equally delightful in both."

"Much obliged for the compliment! We're not so bad,

you know, take us all round. But you agnostics always think you know everything."

"I think I know quite a good deal of Spanish," Auburn remarked irrelevantly. "It will be tremendously useful when next I run over to Spain. I'm grateful to you for that tip, you know, but I wish I could lay hands on some more Spanish literature. I want to read *Don Quixote* in the original."

"How do you get on with your road-mending?" Rose asked. Auburn laughed again, and held up his hands for inspection. They were tanned and roughened and hardened like those of a field-laborer: one of the right finger-nails was blackened, and Auburn tapped it with his left forefinger.

"Not so badly, considering I'm not exactly a skilled artisan. This nail's coming off, I think, but that's the only damage so far. I can swing a pick as one to the manner born, as if—as if I'd spent my life mining in Piccadilly. I recollect I used to bless the L.C.C. for blocking the road in those days. Queer, these changes!"

"You have certainly seen some queer changes in your life."

"Yes, quite. I say, how did the Whitney election go off?"

"I've no business to tell you. The Liberal got in with an increased majority."

"Lucky for Yarborough, the byes going in his favor like this: it'll give him a shove in the right direction.—Oh, you Tories! It's not to be wondered at that God allows you to exist, though, since He created fleas."

Rose bore with this rather unnecessarily strong expression of political sympathy in unmoved good-humor. "Well, I'm glad you like your road-mending," he said cheerfully. "How are you off as regards the sleeping? Dent did not give me much account of you this morning."

"Dent's an old woman."

"Are you better, then? How many hours did you get last night?"

"Don't know," said Auburn coolly: "do you suppose I sleep with my watch under my pillow? If Dent talks to you about me, do me the favor to rub it well into what he calls his head that I won't be sent back to hospital. I'm perfectly fit except for the not sleeping, and that'll get all right now I'm at work again. I wish to heaven I'd never said a word about it! only I thought he ought to be able to patch me up with some of his beastly drugs. Tell me some more newspaper news: how's the sea serpent? It's about due I should say."

Rose looked at him for some moments without answering. Auburn was as brown as a berry and as lean as a lath, and the hideous convict clothing hung on his spare athletic figure like a sack, but apart from his want of flesh and the remarkable brilliance of his eyes he looked very well; and, indeed, nothing ailed him except a fit of insomnia, which had come on him like a strong man armed when he was sent to hospital with his injured foot. The foot had ceased to pain him, but the sleeplessness continued, and he was being dosed with bromide in doses of rapidly increasing strength. Rose laid his cool, sinewy hand suddenly on Auburn's wrist, and held him so for a minute.

"You're very jerky, Auburn. Did you sleep at all last night?—There, never mind: only, when you compare me to a flea, you know, I look for some physical explanation of your crankiness. I don't think there was much news in the paper to-day, but I've really hardly had time to glance at it. I've been across taking service in church—it is a Saint's day, you know——"

"To be sure!" said Auburn. "It had slipped my mind for the moment."

"Scoffer! I met a very pretty girl there, by the bye: I should think I stayed with her a good ten minutes, talking about the graves in the churchyard——" again he bit his

lip: it was so hard to find anything to talk about that was not likely to lead into some such blind alley! Auburn's derisive smile concealed, this time, a sinking heart. He knew of those graves, and had speculated upon his chance of lying under one of them some day. But he did not betray that fact.

"Continue!" said he. "Nameless graves—very sad—Shed a tear and plant a daisy. I know the sort of thing. She proposed to shed the tear and help you plant the daisy."

"Nothing of the sort," said Rose crossly. "She is a perfectly proper young lady, and is living at Menval—that's the next village down the line—for bracing air. She took over a house that some people named Carpenter used to live in, and they told me about her before they went. Poor girl! she is in deep mourning. I fancy they said she had just lost her father: anyhow I know she is a clergyman's daughter, because she told me so."

"Really?" said Auburn. His thoughts had flown to another young lady who was in the same situation, but he did not betray that fact any more than the other, unless it were in an accession of levity. "In that case she is probably a chorus-girl. I never knew a chorus-girl—and I have known a good many in my time—who wasn't a clergyman's daughter."

"You're incorrigible," Rose declared, half vexed. "I shall tell Dent to send you to the infirmary!"

"No, don't hit below the belt. Tell me some more about your young lady. It's years since I've seen or heard of a woman. What was she like—really pretty?"

"I think so: fair hair and blue eyes and an ingenuous sort of face. Rather an old-fashioned type, I should say: the sort of girl that one instinctively wants to take her ticket for." It was a pity Dodo could not hear this tribute to her innocent airs. "I've met her several times at the Governor's. She's deeply interested in prison life. I fancy

she cherishes a private suspicion that all prisoners are half starved."

"So they are—at least, I am. I'd give a thousand pounds for a rump steak any day. It must be jolly to talk to a woman, you lucky beggar! Did you tell her moving tales about your star prisoners?" With wicked acuteness Auburn caught the quick unconscious play of expression in the priest's dark eyes, and the color sprang to his cheeks as he translated Rose's thought into words. "Myself, for example? Did I point the moral? Ah! I wish I'd heard you."

"I wish you had," Rose answered gravely. "You would be none the worse for a woman's pity."

Auburn's indefinable and fleeting grimace indicated that he set no great store by such ware. "She must be very ingenuous to pity a convicted murderer at second-hand," he said. "No, you may have her: I gave her to you! I hate ingenuous young ladies. Sweet, artless things! they know a trick or two."

"Shame on you, Auburn! You of all men ought not to sneer at women."

"What makes you say that?" said Auburn.

He had never spoken Dodo's name in Rose's hearing. The priest colored high, conscious of having allowed a quick temper and a Celtic imagination to run away with him.

"Forgive me: I ought not to have said it."

"But why did you say it?"

"You forget that your letters pass through my hands."

"True," said Auburn, "I did forget."

Rose could have bitten his tongue out. Reading Auburn's letters year by year, he knew—none better—how sore the wound was: knew, too, that he of all men, in his official position, had least right to meddle with it. But the mischief was done now. He touched Auburn gently on the shoulder.

"It was unpardonable of me to say that, it was trading

on a forced confidence. But I only wanted to pull you up. You provoke me excessively, Auburn, when you get on that cynical note. It is so unreal. In your heart you know very well that you respect women: and what's more, you respect me too, and my profession. But when you're in one of these cranky moods you go on and on like a fiddle that's out of tune."

"Damn you!" said Auburn under his breath. "You know very well that I never allow you to talk to me of my private affairs."

It was odd language from prisoner to chaplain, but Rose thought of that as little as Auburn did. He sat for a few moments silent: but the hard coldness of Auburn's face warned him that his time was thrown away, and he rose and touched the indicator over the door.

"I'm very sorry. I'll look in again to-morrow. Don't bear malice, Auburn! Ah, here's Robyns to let me out. Good-bye, my friend."

A shrug of the shoulders was Auburn's only reply, and Rose went out sighing. Left alone, Auburn fell to pacing his cell while he conjugated Spanish irregular verbs. He could no longer trust himself to think of Dodo.

For his faith in her was dead. Never for a long while had come an interview with Roland that he did not expect to hear of her marriage. If she was loyal, why had she never once come to see him? He knew her and her people too well to believe that any conventional scruple would have debarred her. Since she did not come, it was because she did not want to come: and, though her letters had arrived with unfailing punctuality, they had not been couched in such a language of passion as to reassure him. They were written for the official eye, of course, and with such a fate in view one is loth to be expansive, but this reflection did not console Auburn for the laconic simplicity with which Dodo began, "My dear Charles," and ended "Yours very sincerely, D. C. Carminow." Those written since the

death of Mr. Carminow had been peculiarly brief and vague: the last, which had arrived under cover of a line from Roden, gave him no detail of her future movements, and no address but that of Roden's flat in town. It was after getting this letter that Auburn finally resolved to break the links that held her, and, with a Quixotry sadly thrown away on Dodo's lucid common sense, wrung from himself those half-insolent lines whose value Dodo had gauged so accurately. But, if he was Quixotic and absurd, he paid for it: for his letter, and the blank of silence that followed it, cost him dear. He felt himself now absolutely forgotten: and he could not forget. As the dreary autumn rolled by, the longing for news of Dodo so wrought on him that he knew not how to bear it. Faith was dead in him, but love was tenaciously alive, and jealousy, which is as cruel as the grave. It was the thought of Dodo in another man's arms, while he himself was locked within four walls and could not get to her, that had once or twice, by night, broken her lover down to tears.

At length Robyns reappeared. It was one o'clock. Auburn was marched out with his comrades to the parade-grounds, there to undergo the superficial search which took place four times a day. This ceremony over, the great company of misery—cheerful enough to the eye—was drafted off in different detachments, some to the shops, some to the farm, others, and Auburn with them, to the task of road-mending which was reserved for good-conduct men. Under escort of armed warders the file marched out of the prison gates and up the rambling street. A belated tourist (Princetown in the summer months was a favorite resort of sightseers) snapped his camera at them as they went by, to the strong indignation of the warders, and to the dismay of some of the prisoners, who threw up their hands to ward off recognition as though it had been a blow: significant gesture! Auburn, in the front rank, was not one of these.

It was a miserable afternoon. Auburn cared little for that. His lean sinewy body was immune by this time against physical aches and pains, and even Dartmoor under a crawling haze was better than the four walls of his cell. It was glorious work: work that taxed the muscles and gave a man a chance of the weariness that brings blessed sleep. There were clouds and hills, wide tracts of moorland, hedges wet with wintry dew, a free cold movement of wind blowing in from the sea: there was also a constant under-current of lip conversation, which, if not always edifying, was at least better than a man's own thoughts. Traffic passed along the road: Devon country folk, slow of gait and of speech; market carts, with wheels creaking and harness a-jangle; Mrs. Chichester's carriage and pair, with a quartette of ladies and men. Auburn had to step aside as the last went by, and he stood erect, straightening his bent shoulders, running the gauntlet of looks divided between pity and healthy British scorn. He could well imagine that for the next few hundred yards, till the working party should be out of sight, that quartette would be conscious of a shadow. Oh, this best of all possible worlds! They would not eat the less bread and butter for having seen a gang of convicts at work. Auburn's neighbor was the Cockney thief, Jimmy Jones, and Auburn was not surprised, nor altogether unsympathetic, when he heard the little ruffian mutter, "I s'pose they think they're — toffs, an' we're the dirt under their feet."

"And aren't we?" said Auburn. Jimmy gave him an evil look.

"And you think you're a toff too, I s'pose? Ga-awd luv yer!" he drawled out the oath with vicious slow emphasis. "I'll get upsides with them *an'* you too one o' these days, Mr. Sir Charles Auburn of Auburn, Hants, Barrernet—now you go an' peach to the — screw an' say I threatened yer!"

"I shan't peach," said Auburn coolly, "but I wouldn't

advise you to threaten. I could put you down with one hand, Jimmy."

"Ho, could you!" said Jimmy, growing almost audible between surprise and rage. Auburn by the flicker of an eyelid indicated the approach of a warder, but they were at the end of the gang, and Brown stopped to speak to a novice. Jimmy turned his face towards Auburn, the thin lips working crookedly. "Same like you did the old 'un—eh?"

"With one hand, Jimmy. And I shall do it, too, if I hear any more of the talk that was going on this morning. I think you know what I mean."

"Well, of all the blasted——!"

But Jimmy's livid rage had betrayed him to a pair of keen eyes which saw in a moment that more was passing than the ordinary illicit conversation. "Come, that's enough," said Brown peremptorily, "get on with your work, Jones, and you too, Auburn—I'll have no quarrelling, d'you hear?"

"Yes, sir," said Auburn.

Grey clouds, dusking towards brown, with never a rift of sun, so that one could not tell east from west, though it was near sunset: infinite desolation of moorland, rough marshes half reclaimed below, bleak skies of impending winter above: in the foreground of the scene a string of men in grotesque clothes working on the road under the superintendence of armed warders: such was Dartmoor as Dodo saw it on that grim November day.

She came slowly up the road towards the gang of convicts, one of whom she knew, from her talk with Hugh Rose that morning, to be her lover. At her side walked Lesbia, pale and strong, but silent as she: neither woman had a thought to spare from what was coming. Now that the time drew near to act, Dodo longed to postpone it. Those grey dwarfs, toiling under armed surveillance amid

the bleak immensity of the November moor—could one of those be Auburn? If so, he was sorely changed. What stunted, bestial figures! Was Auburn like that, he, too, disfigured and bestialized by three years of shame and misery? A swarm of terrors teemed in Dodo's mind. Had she, after all, wit, coolness, courage, to go through it without self-betrayal? And still more her lover, unwarned, unready—was she not asking too much, even of Auburn's seasoned hardihood? Would he betray himself? Woe, woe if he did, both to him and to her!

Her agony lasted till she saw him: and that was not till she came abreast of the gang, for he was at the far end of it. He was chipping flints, and his eyes were on his work. Dodo watched him stealthily, hungrily, as a woman might peer at the babe she had forsaken. How thin his hands had grown! He was thin altogether: lean, haggard, bleached under his sunburn. His face was pinched: there were hollows at the temples and lines about the nostrils. Yet it was a fine head, and contrasted well with the debased faces near him: it bore the stamp of intellectual force, the refinement of clean thoughts, and iron self-control. All Dodo's terrors fled at this one view of him, and left her steeled into abnormal strength.

As they came up, the women took note of his position. Had it been unfavorable, they would have passed on, for Dodo took no needless risks: but it chanced to be lucky. He was last in the gang; Jimmy Jones, his next neighbor, was also chipping flints, and seemed to be pretty thoroughly absorbed in his task. Brown, a few paces away, was rating a shirker, but broke off to watch the women safely through his division of the file, and to salute Dodo, whom he recognized as a friend of the Governor's wife. To him stepped Lesbia, riveting all idle eyes, as Dodo had reckoned, by her unfamiliar rich accent and remarkable looks. "Could you tell me the time, sir? My mistress and I want to get on to Two Bridges, but I'm thinking we shall be benighted."

Meanwhile, under cover of this conjurer's patter, Dodo, strolling on by Auburn's side of the road, had come so near to him that she could have thrown her arms round his neck. Auburn, struck by what seemed to him to be a strange duplicate of Lesbia's tones, looked up, not with the ugly sidelong peep of his mates, but with the old straight and keen glance. Their eyes met: neither spoke. Auburn stood quite still, leaning his clenched hands on the handle of his pick. Dodo was carrying a muff: she let it fall, and when she picked it up she left, where it had fallen, a tiny packet.

As she rose and felt his eyes on her again, the knowledge came to Dodo that if she delayed another moment she would be in Auburn's arms. She would have liked to delay. It would have been the loss of all: good! would not all be well lost if but for one moment she could be in Auburn's arms? It was only by a blind exertion of will that she could force herself to look aside and go quietly on down the road. Not a touch, not a syllable did they exchange. Dodo had longed for a chance to slip the parcel into his hand, but that was before she saw him in the flesh. Touch his hand? One touch, and she would have been on his breast.

XXVII.

“‘N OW then, Auburn, are you going to sleep?’”

Auburn was still leaning on his pick, motionless, and he looked so queer that Brown, a good-natured fellow in the main, though given to hectoring—came up and touched his arm. “What’s wrong with you, eh?”

Dodo’s packet lay not six inches from Brown’s foot. It was small and very thin, and covered with silk that matched the road. Auburn came to his senses and to the knowledge that he must not, for his life, look down at it, or try to get hold of it or to hide it.

“I felt queer for a moment. I’m all right now, thanks.”

“Well, get on with your job, then. This ain’t a workus!” said Brown the sardonic. He moved away, and Auburn instantly set his foot on the packet. Later on he was able to pick it up unobserved.

At half-past four the men quitted work for the day, and were marched back into the parade ground. Here all had to stand with jacket and shirt open, arms thrown out, cap in one hand and handkerchief in the other, while trained fingers were passed over them from head to foot. The search, though rapid, should have been exhaustive. Human nature, however, is human nature. It was an afternoon of cold and fog and early dusk: each convict had been searched thrice that day already: Auburn’s was a job that did not involve the handling of such small tools as could readily be hidden in a fold of clothing: and Auburn himself, while at Dartmoor, had never lost a mark. When the door of the cell was locked upon him, Dodo’s packet was still secure.

But he dared not open it yet. The place was still wide awake, warders were coming and going: at any moment one might look in. He made up his bed, and sat down to read Spanish grammar till six o'clock, when they brought his supper—bread and cheese and cocoa, and not enough of either to satisfy his incorrigibly healthy appetite. At last, however, the cell was locked up, and he had the night before him, and ten minutes more of electric light to see by. He lay down, pulled the blanket over him, and with insensibly slow movements drew off the silken wrapper. In it he found a three-inch file of exquisite temper and a slip of thin paper in Dodo's writing. Prone on his plank bedstead with his head propped on his hands and the letter spread open under him he contrived to read it without much risk.

“With this file you'll be able to cut your window-bars. Tear your blanket into strips, knot them, and lower yourself to the ground. The outer wall of the prison is twenty feet high and leans inwards. I will be at the northeast angle: tap three times, and I will throw a rope over. As you will have to dodge the watchmen, I shall wait all night from nine till five. This plan is practicable: it has been done. But it must be to-night, or they may find the file. Once in our house you may lie *perdu* for a twelvemonth; I have seen to that. No one can suspect us, no one knows my name. I've planned this ever since the trial. For God's sake, do not hesitate! For you, the risk of a shot in the dark is better than sixteen years more in prison, and my heart is breaking. I love you so, I think I shall die if you don't come to me. I would rather be killed with you than suffer any longer as I do now day and night thinking of you. God bless and keep you, and bring you safe to your own love, now and for ever.”

Auburn read this letter through till he had got it fairly

by heart. His next act was of an eminently practical nature—he ate it. After that he lay still and listened. Night watchmen wore rubber shoes and walked lightly, but the ear of the convict was so acute that he rarely failed to hear them, and it was not long before Auburn was aware of a stealthy tread in the corridor: Hill had just come on guard. Was Auburn to be spied this time? If so, with his clean reputation, he was not likely to be inspected again for some while, for the rounds were long, and the watchman had many cells on his beat. For the first time in his prison life Auburn heard the click of the flap, as it was lifted over the spy-hole, without a qualm of distaste. It was soon over: the man passed on.

He was no sooner gone than Auburn began to ply his file. It was exquisitely sharp, and bit through the bars like wax. He had to work slowly, however, so as to make the minimum of noise: the watchman was out of earshot, but there were his neighbors to be considered, who would not have been slow to curry favor by putting a spoke in his wheel. At length it was done—such work goes pretty fast—and Auburn was able to lift away the whole framework, bars, glass, and ventilator, leaving only the stump of one bar for the loop of his cord. Half a pane of glass cracked, and, before he could grasp it, fell out of the window: he heard it smash on the stones below. Had the out patrol passed at that moment, the game would have been up. But, when the roaring of nervous blood in Auburn's ears had died down, he found all as still as ever. So much for the window.

Next he had to tear his blanket into strips and knot it into a rope. “ ‘Send it isn't shoddy!’ ” he muttered with the ghost of a laugh: his cell was fully thirty feet from the ground. Luckily, he was a practiced athlete. The rope when completed was not above twenty feet long. He hitched the knot over his inch and a half of iron bar, and swung on it to test its strength. At that moment he heard the step of the inside patrol in the corridor. His blood

ran like water and his knees knocked together as he hung—he had not even time to get back to bed: the step passed on: it halted before his neighbor's door: passed on again—he was safe. For the moment!

Cautiously he paid out the rope: and now came the hardest job of all! The window measured perhaps two feet by eighteen inches, and was high off the floor. How to put himself outside it with nothing but a stool to mount on, Auburn did not know, but it had to be done, and he did it: though he thought at one time that he should stick fast, and be found the next morning with his head on one side and his legs on the other. Nor was he much happier when he was out and swinging over a thirty-foot drop. The night was pitch dark, and wet with the denseness of the fog: and into that fog, that dark, that unfathomable pit of danger, Auburn felt a strong physical disinclination to go. His fingers locked themselves round the stump of the bar: he had to use force with himself before he could disengage them, and throw all his weight on a strip of Government blanket. In all the world he could see no glimmer of light. Deciding to trust to luck and Dodo's prayers (luck came first), he began to let himself down, hand over hand, slowly, and straining his ears for the step of the out patrol: and he did manage to get half-way before the rope snapped above his head, and he dropped—but, luckily, fell clear of the splintered glass. No bones were broken. As for the noise, that was loud enough in Auburn's ears to wake the whole prison: yet the prison did not awake.

Picking himself up with all the constellations dancing in his head, Auburn peered about him. It was so dark that he could not see his hand before his face: nor could he tell north from south: nor had he any clear idea which way to go. A prisoner's window is filled with ground glass, so that Auburn actually did not know where his cell was placed: he only knew that the sun came into it late on summer evenings. This was a point on which Dodo had not reck-

oned! Taking roughly that he was on a north-west wall, Auburn decided to strike straight forward towards what he concluded to be the direction of the road, and he was just feeling along the bricks to get his bearings when he saw a good way off a shining eye of fire: the lantern of the out patrol.

He crouched down against the wall. His nerves were so undone that he would have liked to cry out "I surrender," and if Dodo had not been waiting for him it was on the cards that he would have done it: but for love of Dodo he schooled himself to take his chance. He saw the light flashing nearer, this way and that, starred by the fog: now it flickered over a bleak buttress, now it picked out every crevice on the asphalt pavement. Its flitting finger touched into momentary life objects familiar by day: they leapt out of the dark and sank back into it. It rayed a window within reach of Auburn's arm: it struck a spark from an isolated splinter of glass a yard from his foot. Auburn could hear the step, the breath of the watchman. He stopped, not half a dozen yards from the crouching man: he chafed his free hand over the benumbed hand that held the light: its beam went dancing right over Auburn's face—but Warder Collins at that moment was thinking of his own blue fingers and not of escaping convicts.

"Blasted cold!" he muttered. "A nice night for my rheumatics, I don't think!" He moved on.

There is nothing so demoralizing as to be hunted. Although Auburn knew now exactly where he was—his subconscious intelligence having printed off the scene detail by detail into one complete photograph—it was some minutes before he could do anything but cower under the wall. At length he whipped himself to his feet with an oath and a laugh under his breath, and made straight across the prison yard for the outer wall. When he had gained it, he had only to grope along to its next corner on the right, and was at the end of his journey.

He tapped three times, and before a moment had gone by other taps answered him. By day the sounds would have been inaudible, by night they were barely to be distinguished. Something whizzed through the air and fell at his feet. He picked it up, and found a pebble muffled in felt, attached to a string. Gathering in the string hand over hand, he came at length to a stout rope, and the line ceased to pay out: evidently it was made fast on the other side. He went up it like the sailor that he was, and was soon astride of the wall. He looked down, but could see nothing: earth, sky, and whoever stood below were buried in the dark of the moor fog. He felt along the wall with his toes till he found the buttress which propped the angle. Prison walls slope inward: the outer side is, therefore, comparatively easy to descend. In the angle formed by the buttress Auburn slid slightly down, barking his legs and elbows, and parting with rags of his dress on the way: his feet touched earth.

"Dodo?" he breathed.

"Here," answered Dodo's murmured tones out of the gloom: and Dodo's hands fumbled for him and found him. Auburn could see nothing of her but the dim whiteness of her upturned face. He leaned down to her and drew her into his arms, her cheek against his bared breast, his lips touching her hair. She could feel the deep labored throbbing of his heart, and she turned her head and kissed it. "Mine," she said, "mine, mine, my dearest."

"Love! Dodo!"

"No, no, I can't bear it——"

Such passion burns like fire: but Dodo forgot the pain as she felt Auburn's breast rise in a great sob, and then he murmured, in a voice altogether changed—

"O God—God! what have I done? I've been mad! This risk you're running! Let me go back!"

"No, no, too late! Ah, I knew you'd say it. No, Charles, no—you can't. I'd give myself up if you did."

It was true. He might—and would—curse himself till Doomsday: there was no going back.

“Dodo, if they take me——”

“They shan’t.”

“If they do, remember, it was well worth while. Nothing they could do to me—or to you either, I swear—would not be well redeemed by this—by you——” he strained her closer, as though through the mist of the night and the veil of the flesh he would have drawn her very soul to his own.

“They shan’t take you. We’ll die together first.”

“They will take you, and make small bones about it, if you dawdle about much longer. Get his boots on, child, while I finish hauling in the slack o’ the rope: is this a time to stand hugging and kissing each other?”

This was good sense though roughly phrased, and Dodo, who had forgotten Lesbia’s existence, was quick to disengage herself. “Take off your shoes,” she said. Auburn obeyed as well as he could, his bruised fingers fumbling in the darkness with the wet laces. “Now these,” said Dodo, and Auburn drew on a pair of boots which would leave no mark of the broad arrow. “Cap and overcoat now,” said Dodo, thrusting them into his hands. “Pick up your shoes, we don’t want to give away a single fact about you. Now, Lesbia, you go first—you can see in the dark.”

That midnight walk was the strangest experience of Auburn’s strangely varied life. The sense of hurry, the darkness, the dread that gained on him every moment of hearing the clang of the prison bell contributed to make up such a blur of impressions that he could get no grasp of his own mind at all, but was simply carried on, as Dodo had planned that he should be, like a straw in the wind. Lesbia walked ahead, not once at fault, though even in the open country—where it is never so dark as between trees or houses—the gloom was dense. Auburn and Dodo followed hand in hand like children. “How is it you can find your way?” Auburn

murmured once. "We've been here a dozen times before on dark nights," answered Dodo. At first they trod quaking marshlands; then they came to a low stone wall, which Auburn vaulted and lifted Dodo over: then a hay-meadow, the wintry grass short and sere and dripping with cold dew: then through a gap in a briar-hedge, and so down into the road. Once they heard the sound of wheels coming up in the rear, but there was time for them to slip back through the hedge and lie down in the field behind it. The trap—a gig—went racketing by, the farmer on the box-seat lustily carolling a country song: and Dodo and Auburn crouched side by side in the freezing dew, and felt as though it were warm midsummer. When the gig had gone by they went on again, always hand in hand.

At length they saw the few lights of Menval scattered in the valley, one here and there in a watcher's casement, and Dodo gave Auburn's hand a squeeze. "Jeannie's window," she breathed, nodding towards the nearest lamp. Auburn heard the low click of a garden gate, and Lesbia's hands on his shoulders pushed him warily through it: he was marched up the narrow garden path, and smelt the rich night scent of lavender, and felt the bushes brush against his legs. Next followed the creak of an opening door. His foot was on the threshold, when there came chiming between the midnight hills a low, humming tone—another—another, doubling and redoubling into a loud startled tolling, a clamorous jangle that spoke far and wide over the moor. Dodo's hand locked itself over Auburn's: he heard her long, shuddering breath. Even Lesbia stopped dead in terror. But Auburn turned and stood for a moment looking back towards the great bulk of building, lost in the darkness, which for so long had been his grave. Dodo saw the queer slant of his head, held very high.

"Oh, Dodo, what a devil of a row!" he exclaimed. "I'd give anything to see old Topsy in his pyjamas, when they break the news to him!"

XXVIII.

WIDE open stood the door at the head of the stairs: a flood of light streamed from it and blinded them as they came in. While Lesbia stayed to make fast lock and bar, Dodo led Auburn up to the room that had been Jeannie's, but was now ready for a guest. The shutters were up and the curtains drawn: a great rosy fire flickered on the hearth: a tall lamp stood on an oaken table which was set out for supper, with white damask and gleam of silver and scent and freshness of flowers. Armchairs and lounges were gay with delicate chintzes, nor had Dodo omitted the laden bookshelves and sober engravings that spoke of civilized life. After four years in a prison cell it was strange to come into this place, which shone like a jewel and smelt of violets.

Near the fire sat Jeannie, thin and fever-cheeked. She started up as they came in, and held out her hands. "Oh! Mr. Charles, is it you indeed?"

"Well, old Jeannie, how are you?"

Battling with the sense of unreality, Auburn bent to touch her forehead with his lips. But Jeannie drew back, looking up at him with great eyes of bewilderment and terror. "What is it, child?" said Auburn. "I'm not a ghost!" She had no answer ready. The color came into Auburn's cheeks and he relinquished his grasp. "Am I so changed?"

"Don't touch me," said Jeannie. "You're too like your father."

"What, isn't he dead yet?" said Auburn.

His manner was almost as wild as Jeannie's: he had not

been prepared for the raising of that ghost. Luckily Lesbia now struck in with her plain prose. "Hark at that child! Leave talking such rubbish to a starved man, and put the soup on the fire, will you? I thought you'd more sense. There's Miss Dodo has twice as much wits about her as you have!" Dodo was cutting bread. "Sit down, you," to Auburn. "Take that overcoat off first, it's drenching wet." Auburn hesitated. "Take it off! D'you want to sit in wet clothes longer than you need?"

"Ah! Lesbia . . ."

"What's wrong now?"

She saw what was wrong, as Auburn, with a deep flush, threw off his overcoat and sat down by the fire, a convict once more. Dodo came and knelt by him and laid her cheek against his. The iron had gone deep, they all saw it in that moment. Innocent though he knew himself to be, he had been made, in those years, to feel himself degraded by the felon's dress to the level of a felon. He did not even return Dodo's caress, but sat looking moodily into the fire. Lesbia could have slapped Jeannie, whose dark fancy had helped to precipitate a reaction which was perhaps inevitable: but there was nothing to be gained by slapping Jeannie. The wise woman knew what was best to be done.

"My word! I don't wonder you didn't want to take your coat off. The boy's fair indecent—and we three women, and only one of us married! Here, give me the rug, Jean, and you, Miss Dodo, get up and get out of the way." She caught up a covering from the sofa and threw it over Auburn's shoulders, which were in point of fact half bare, for his clothes had suffered by window and wall. "You'll get those rags off when you've had your supper. We've got a suit of Mr. Carew's waiting for you."

"Roland's? He's never in it?"

"He? He's a man, and an idiot at that. God forbid I should call men idiots," Lesbia conceded generously: "all I'd ever say is that when the Almighty lays to His hand to

create the prince and pink of idiots it's not a woman He turns out. Your sweetheart wrote asking his wife to let us have some of their cast clothes to give to the poor—and that's no lie, for you're poor if ever any man was—you've not got enough to cover you. Get up, Miss Dodo, I want to come there." She went down on her knees and began to pull off Auburn's muddy boots and wet stockings, and he let her do it as she had done it for him when he was a child: it was good to feel the warmth of the fire on his bare feet. It was four years since Auburn had sat by a fireside. Meanwhile, Jeannie brought up a small table and Dodo set on it a plate of soup, smoking hot. "Now, then, drink that up," said Lesbia. "Bread, Jeannie."

"I can't," said Auburn. It was not only the racking, nervous strain and the physical fatigue of his escape, nor the fear of recapture—it was the love and devotion of these women that touched him so keenly as to overthrow his self-control. He pushed away the soup and leaned his head on his hand, covering his eyes. Lesbia stood watching him as a doctor watches his patient. She glanced at Dodo, who shook her head. Only a passionless love could serve him now.

"There now," said Lesbia, grumbling, "all my nice soup wasted! Drink a little, dear, just to please me." She drew down Auburn's hand and put the spoon to his lips, coaxing him as she would have coaxed a sick child. "Do you mind how you used to come to me when Sir Charles was in one of his tantrums? You always said you liked my soup better than his dinners. Drink it up now, it'll do you good."

She spoke with authority, and Auburn yielded because he was too languid to resist: and after the first two or three spoonfuls she had no more trouble. If Auburn's mind was not hungry, his body was, and had been for years, and the savory taste of Lesbia's soup and the perfume of her St. Emilion were much too good, after prison fare, to be refused.

Soon he was sufficiently himself again to declare that he would not eat alone, and they drew the table over to the fireside and sat down to the strangest meal they had ever eaten. Stealth and secrecy, dangers half escaped and joy hardly proven, the sense of the dark night pressing on the window panes and of the bell drumming out its great alarm over the sleeping moors, all wrought together into a complex of impressions where pleasure bordered on pain. It seemed incredible that they should be hungry, and yet they were: the keen night air had given them an appetite. Jeannie indeed ate next to nothing, but that was Jeannie's way: and the others cleared the board, to Lesbia's deep satisfaction, for she loved to see people eat of her cookery. When Auburn finally threw out hints in the direction of a cigarette, she could begin to believe that she had her boy again. She had some for him, of course, of his own special brand, and she could hardly go to clear the table for the joy of watching him smoke. Even Dodo, in spite of a vagrant sense of humor, owned that he did look more like himself with a cigarette between his lips. So she phrased it, but in reality she knew that the change went deeper: his cheeks were no longer paper-white under their sunburn, but healthily brown: his eyes were brilliant but steady, and he carried himself less nervously erect.

The clock struck twelve. "Here's an unchristian hour!" said Lesbia. "It's time we were all in bed. Get you to yours, Jeannie, you're looking as tired as a wilted lily. Miss Dodo, I'll go down and see all ready. Bide you here and talk to your man."

"What are you going to do with me?" Auburn asked; but Lesbia sailed out of the room without a reply, and Auburn and Dodo were left alone for the first time. Auburn was lying back in a big chair by the fire, his long legs stretched out, his bare feet thrust into slippers. He took his cigarette from his lips and puffed out a wreath of smoke. "Ouf! Raleigh, I hope your soul's in heaven. What are

you going to do with me, Dodo? Eh?" Dodo was brushing the crumbs from the cloth when Auburn's long lean arm shot out, locked round her waist, and drew her to him. "Come here where I can watch you: sit on the arm of my chair. If I had the feelings of a gentleman I should get up and offer you my place: or possibly I should take my arm away and let you go and sit where I could not watch you, as you seemed desperately inclined to do. You observe, I do neither. Indomitable child! you've taken extraordinary pains to get me—what do you mean to do with me now you have got me?"

"Keep you here till the hue and cry has died down."

"The hue and cry," repeated Auburn. "What penny dreadfuls call the sleuth-hounds of the law, alias George Robyns, Jan Polperrow, Robert Brown, and so on. How they must be cursing me for sending them out on a night like this! Last time a man got away by night one of the screws fell into Yes Bog and was as nearly as possible suffocated. I have heard that his language when they got him out rivalled—rivalled Jimmy Jones'. Or mine. Have I sworn at you yet, Dodo? I probably shall. Princetown isn't a good school of manners."

"Well, yours were never very good," said Dodo. "You were always rather early Victorian on that point."

"I'd give sixpence to have been a fly on the wall when they told Topsy. It'll kill him if I do get off. I shan't, you know."

"I believe you're as safe here as you would be in the Desert of Sahara."

"Ah! but then I doubt whether an escaped convict would be safe in the Desert of Sahara. The hue and cry, my love——"

He broke off and sprang to his feet. "Talk of an angel! There it goes, if I'm not much mistaken. Listen to that fellow cantering down the road!"

Dodo held her breath, and in the stillness heard plainly

the clicking triple time of horse-hoofs coming down the side-road from the prison. "On his way to Menval Station," said Auburn. "I say, I wonder who it is! I *must* find out." He made one step to the table and extinguished the lamp. "Go to the window and ask him what's up!"

"But, Charles——"

"Go, or I swear I'll go myself!"

She heard him laugh in the dark and was seized with sudden terror: she knew his reckless ways too well to set any limit to his daring. She dropped the bar of the shutter and threw up the window just as the horseman passed: he drew rein at the noise, and turned in his saddle to flash the light of an electric torch over Dodo as she leaned out. A flash of lightning could not have struck her more unexpectedly, and the fears of a lifetime were crowded into the moment that elapsed before her blinded eyes showed her that Auburn was hidden by the curtain.

"Who's that?" called out the rider. "What are you doin' there, miss?"

("It's Robyns, as I live!" said Auburn.)

"We heard the bell ringing, and were startled," Dodo answered. "Is anything wrong?"

"There's no need for you to be frightened, miss. One of our prisoners has got away, but he can't have gone far. Our men are looking out for him, I expect we'll get him back by morning."

"Dear, how awful!" Dodo's clear tones floated down with a most natural tremor of alarm. "An escaped convict quite close to us!" She heard Auburn's stifled laugh at her side, and was ready to believe that Robyns would hear it too. "I hope he's not a very dangerous criminal!"

"Dangerous? Bless you, no, miss—a little bit of a fellow that wouldn't hurt a fly," said Robyns the good-natured. ("Confound your impudence!" interjected Auburn.) "You look out that all your doors are well locked and bolted and you'll be all right. I must go on now, but

there's plenty of us about—I'll tell some of our chaps to keep an eye on you."

He rode on. Dodo could scarcely shut the window for the trembling of her hands, but Auburn had gone off into a fit of laughter. "Oh, Dodo, how rich! I wouldn't have missed that for the world."

"Oh, don't Charles!"

"My darling what is it?"

He felt her trembling as he took her in his arms. "Little love, what have I done to you?" said Auburn.

"Oh, how could you?"

"How could I what? My dearest, there was no danger!"

"If he'd seen you!"

"Ah! there you have me," said Auburn ruefully. "I hadn't reckoned on his carrying a torch. I suppose it was a bit risky, if you come to think about it."

"Risky!" Dodo repeated. "You think so, do you? It dawns on you, in fact, by degrees?—Charles, I believe you like playing with danger." Auburn's impenitent laugh roused her to a passion of impatience. "Oh, how can you be so childish, so cruel?"

"I forgot. I'm very sorry."

"Say you won't do it again."

"Never, never, on my honor! I'll be all that there is of most circumspect!" Auburn assured her. Dodo did not dream of believing him, but she allowed herself to be coaxed into amity, for, after all, the danger was over, and Auburn's mad humor was an essential element of the Auburn she loved. He drew her back to the warm hearth, where the fire had sunk to a glow of coral shot with little flames of smoky blue. "I'm glad I'm not out in that pitchy dark," he said. "Poor dear Robyns, I hope he won't tumble into Yes or any other bog, he's a dear fellow. Well, Dodo, I have been a most infernal fool——"

"Amen," said Dodo.

"And knave," finished Auburn calmly. "Infernal, I

repeat it. A fool, because I probably shan't get away: a knave, because if they catch me I shall let you in for an appalling scandal: and lost to all eternity because—" he hesitated, even he, for a moment—"because I love you better than the vision of God or the dream of heaven. You understand that?"

"Understand——?"

"That I love you."

He had her fast locked in his arm: she could not escape him. What was not fear, but might have been called a fear of fear, traversed Dodo's mind like the gleam of a sword-blade: she turned her steel-clear eyes on Auburn's dark, half-mocking face. "Do you say this to me now, Charles?"

"Yes," said Auburn. "No. I dare say you're right. I owe this to Princetown, too, I suppose. You're half afraid of me, are you?" His features did not change, but she knew by intuition that he had read her thoughts and that they had cut him to the quick. She could find no answer, and Auburn with a queer smile stepped back, took her hand, and raised it to his lips. "It has not made a brute of me, Dodo," he said. "I don't wonder you're nervous, though. It was brutalizing enough: it might have done the trick, if I hadn't had the memory of you to keep me quiet. Still, thanks to you, I'm not much changed in essentials, so far as I know. My respect for you is undiminished, I assure you——"

"Oh, don't," said Dodo quickly. "Don't go on explaining, Charles."

"But——"

"No, no."

"But you were half afraid of me?"

"No, I tell you, no," said Dodo imperiously. "Stay! I won't lie to you. I did have one flash of doubt of you, but it was not because of Princetown. Princetown!" She laughed. "You think so much of that, and I think so little."

"What was it, then?"

"Why, you see, all the days I've known you put together don't come to much above six weeks! It flashed over me that there might be kinks in you that I knew nothing of, and that one of them might be to think lightly of a woman who had thrown herself into your arms, as I have. Is that frank enough?"

"Frank enough," Auburn assented. "You don't think it now?"

"Oh no. Your eyes, my dear, when you saw what I thought, were more—considerably more—eloquent than your speech.

"I may tell you that I love you, then? You won't think I'm trading on your frankness—?" Dodo sprang up to silence him, and, as if against his will, again came that long embrace, terrible in its repressed passion, crushing her against his heart, making her feel all the ache and all the sadness of those long intolerable nights when he had lain awake thinking of her. "Oh, my God," she heard him say, "this—this is heaven."

"And the other has been hell?"

"Very like it."

"All the time?"

"Yes, all the time."

"Charles, were you afraid of going mad?"

"Sometimes."

"At night?"

"Yes."

"Why was it so bad? The humiliation?"

She felt him shudder from head to foot, but he crushed down the rising wildness and answered quietly: "Yes, the humiliation and the inability to—I can't express myself."

"The feeling that you couldn't get out?"

"Yes."

"Those insufferable little spy-holes?"

"Those, too."

"Let us have it out between us, Charles."

"I—can't."

"To me."

"Not even to you."

"Yes, to me, once."

Again she felt him shudder, but she was ruthless: she read him too profoundly to let him go. She had never seen him in one of his fits of despair, but she knew them to be the inevitable, if rare, complement of his fits of reckless gaiety, and she knew too that dark memories nursed in privacy are the stuff of which despair is made. At length he said, "Well, you ought to know how near a man has got to the wild beasts, if you're going to marry him. Look here." He stood away, stretching out his sinewy lean arm, and laid the other hand on certain odd red marks—a small double row—that disfigured the smooth, brown skin. "Do you know what that is?"

"No," said Dodo: not without a suspicion that she did.

"I'll tell you, though I expect it will make you rather sick. It was one night last August: a red-hot night after a red-hot day. . . . The worst that one can go through is to see this life as it is . . . so short . . . and such torment. I couldn't sleep . . . I didn't want to be marched off to the padded room, so—I bit into it like an apple."

"And did that cure you?" Dodo asked with a choking gasp of laughter.

"Clean. What with the pain, by Jove! *didn't* it sting! and the—the general queerness of the flavor, it brought me up with a round turn——"

He broke off. The door had opened to admit Lesbia, candle in hand, her dark, stern eyes softening as they fell on Auburn's face. There were times when Dodo wondered whether even Jeannie, despite the tie of blood, were so dear to Lesbia as this foster son of hers, who had from the first taken the place of the little dead son.

"What, all in the dark?" said Lesbia. "Ah, it's well

to be young. Come to bed, my lad: a night's rest will settle your nerves—not to mention that you'll be none the worse of a good wash."

She led the way down to the hall, where Auburn peered curiously at what he could see of Mr. Carpenter's Eves, and had the imprudence to ask if they were Caron's doing: and thence by a second flight of stairs into the cellar, where, throwing open a door at the farther end, she ushered Auburn into what had once no doubt been a wine-vault, but was now transformed into a rough but tolerably comfortable bedroom. An oil stove kept it warm, a thick Persian carpet covered the stone floor, and a reading lamp burned brightly on a table littered with books and magazines. Auburn stood in the doorway with his hands in his pockets and primmed his mouth to a long, low whistle. "Oh, you women!" he said, "you certainly have done the thing thoroughly."

"You're to stay here for a night or two," Dodo explained, "in case by any wild chance they should want to look over the house. There's no key to the door, it fastens with a spring, and there are two strong bolts on the inside, so that I could truthfully tell them I can't open it. But they won't want to get in: why should they? There's absolutely nothing to connect me with the affair."

"There are your clothes for to-morrow," Lesbia said, pointing to a suit of Roland's rough tweeds laid out on the bed. "And hot water for your tub," she indicated a couple of smoking cans. "Now get to bed and to sleep, my boy, for I do believe you may lie down in safety."

"For two pins I'd go back and give myself up." "

"What maggot have you got in your head now?"

"Suppose they did catch me, and that they caught me here, what would that mean, for you two?"

"I believe two years is the maximum penalty," said Dodo. "I'd risk my life for you with great pleasure, dear

boy, but the regulations won't let me—also there isn't a shadow of risk."

"For two pins I'd go back now and give myself up."

"Do: and I'll come with you and tell them how you filed the bars."

"Dodo, you really have very fine eyes," said Auburn irrelevantly. "They flash like steel." He threw his arm round her and dropped a kiss on either eyelid, laughing at Lesbia's Puritan frown. "Come, we'll fight it out, then! and by all that's ironical, we'll swear Hugh Rose over under seal of confession to marry us. He's a sportsman—I believe he'd do it. Good-night, old Lesbia—good-night, Lady Auburn!"

XXIX.

A PRISONER had escaped. The alarm bell was ringing up at the prison: quiet country folk heard it and sat up in bed with scared faces: anxious husbands stole barefoot down to look to bolt and bar. Dartmoor had never grown used to such incidents, although they commonly ended, after a day's manhunt, in the recapture of a starved and whimpering wretch, too broken-spirited to show fight. A thrill of joy, dashed with envy, ran through the prison itself: *a prisoner had escaped!*

In the morning news more definite—and more sensational—came round with the milk, with the butcher, with the baker. The fugitive was a man to be feared, a “lifer,” a murderer, notorious for one brutal crime and desperate enough to stick at nothing. A strong force of warders were out scouring the moors for a man in prison dress marked with the broad arrow, and the loaded guns of the civil guard commanded the high roads. The news was flashed along the wires up and down the line. It was in London in the small hours, and by breakfast time the newsboys of one enterprising journal were bawling it along the streets: “Escype of a Convick! Escype of the Convick Orburn! All the detiles!” and so on, leather-lunged.

Three men who had been breakfasting together, when they heard the cries, could not believe their ears. Sir George Trevor, called to town on business, had sent for Caron Carminow from his studio and Roden from his flat to give him news of their doings. They were talking in a group by the window when the harsh cry was raised in the street below, and they were all visibly startled.

"Nonsense, it can't be!" said Caron, leaning out to peer at the news-sheet.

Sir George spoke over his shoulder to a servant. "Get me one of those papers, will you?"

When it came, he sent the man out before he opened it. The broad black headlines seized his eye at once:

ESCAPE OF A CONVICT FROM DARTMOOR.

THE AUBURN MURDERER AT LARGE.

WHO FILED THE BARS?

Extraordinary Details

by our Special Correspondent,

who happened in the present case to be an enterprising local schoolmaster, revised and expanded in Fleet Street. Sir George held up the paper before him, and the others read it leaning over his shoulder. When it was done, all three betrayed an equal indisposition to meet one another's eyes.

"A most extraordinary story—most extraordinary," said Sir George.

"I say, you know—who did file those bars?" said Caron.

"I must go, Sir George," said Roden. "I'm awfully sorry, but I believe there's an express down that will just give me time to see my chief at Whitehall."

"I'll come too."

"And so, if you'll let me, will I," said Sir George very gravely. "I think, my dear boys, it will do our little girl no harm to have some one rather older and more experienced than yourselves to look after her. If by any chance——"

"If what?" said Caron bluntly.

"If—if——" said Roden: "leave it at that, Car. Do come, Sir George. It's most good of you to suggest it, and we shall be very glad to have you, if you can spare the time from your business."

"Your father's daughter is my most urgent business," said Sir George.

They reached Menval by five o'clock, and the reality of the affair was at once brought home to them by the sight of a warder stationed on the platform with a loaded gun. As they walked up through the village they passed a notice posted on a hoarding, and Caron halted to read it. "Prisoner just escaped! November 3rd, between 9 and 11 p.m. Registered number, L.A., 27, Charles St. Leger Auburn. Convicted of murder at Hillingdon Assizes, penal servitude for life. Born at Auburn, aged thirty-eight years and eight months; dark complexion, reddish hair, brown eyes, height six feet one and a half inches. At time of his escape he was wearing a brown Glengarry cap, brown cloth jacket, beverteen breeches, blue stockings with red stripes, brown worsted shirt, pair of shoes, forefinger nail of right hand blackened, scar on left wrist."

"Good heavens, how cold-blooded!" said the artist, shivering. He was sensitive to such impressions, and the dry, bare, mean record degraded his memory of Auburn to its own level.

Hurrying on after Sir George and Roden, he turned a corner of the street just as they came to the gate of Heather Cottage. It was a dreary evening, the sky darkened by many folds of cloud and mist, brown over grey: the sun was not long down, however, and had left a few embers to smoulder red on the rim of the horizon, and by that dim half-light Caron distinctly saw the head of a man rise up over the hedge that bordered the opposite side of the road. He had seen that cap and coat in illustrations too often to be mistaken, and they sent a chill to his blood: why in heaven's name should a prison warder be furtively on guard over Heather Cottage?

They rapped at the door. It was opened to them by Lesbia, singularly pale and set, though not a thread was astray in her dark bands of hair.

"What do you want now——?" she was beginning, when she recognized Roden; "Mr. Roden! God bless us all, what brings you down here?"

"Where's my sister?" Roden asked. Before Lesbia could reply Dodo herself, lint-white but cool, appeared on the threshold.

"Good boys," she said. "I knew you'd come. And, what—Sir George Trevor? Oh, how very good of you! But I'm sorry, sorry you should have troubled about me. You've heard the news, then?"

"Indeed we have," said Sir George gravely. He followed Dodo into the small, prim, white and blue parlor, hung round with water-colors from Stanton Mere, which she had planned to make over to Auburn's masculine disorder. Sir George sat down, erect and soldierly, in an oaken armchair, while Dodo remained standing, her white youthfulness set off by her heavy black serge dress. "The boys were breakfasting with me when we heard them calling it out in the streets."

"Oh! surely it's not in London already?"

"What's not in London?" said Roden quickly.

"Oh, you haven't heard?" She slipped her hand into Roden's, and saw that he was paler than herself. "No, no, they haven't caught him—they won't, they can't do that! But a most tiresome thing has happened. The prison officials have taken it into their heads that Charles came here after he escaped, and sheltered somewhere on the premises."

"Good heavens! you don't mean to say they've found out——?"

"My name? No, they can't have: not a soul here knows it, I'm certain of that. It's a pure coincidence."

"But what has given them this idea?" asked Sir George.

"I can't imagine," said Dodo. "The men this morning said something about tracking him by his shoes—you know, they all have the broad arrow marked on the sole—but that's impossible, because——"

“Because what?”

“Oh—how could they follow such a track all the way from Provincetown? It’s a mile by the road; besides, it’s absurd to suppose he would have come by the road,” answered Dodo. She left on them all the impression that she had not said what she had been going to say, as was indeed the fact: for her real thought was that Auburn could not well have been traced by the shoes that he had carried in his pocket. “It’s nothing but a pretext.”

“Have they been over the house, then?”

“Yes, they would go. It has made poor Jeannie quite ill: she’s not at all strong, you know, and nothing could possibly be worse for her than this excitement. And I believe there are warders watching outside now.”

“I saw one as I came in,” said Caron.

“Oh! surely they can’t mean to stay all night?” Dodo cried out, clenching her hands together. “It is horrible that we should be so spied on!”

“It’s most extraordinary. Are they coming back, do you suppose?”

“You hear what Caron says: they’ve never gone.”

“But will they renew the search?”

“Oh, I don’t know: how should I know, Sir George? I can’t conceive how they can—I thought one was safe in one’s own house!”

“It’s a thousand pities you ever came down here at all,” said Sir George, unable to restrain himself any longer. “Now, my dear, you see—if you had taken my advice like a sensible girl——”

“Of course!” Dodo broke in, with a fire-flash of something deeper than impatience, “but how could any one foresee what would happen? Who would ever have thought of this?”

So the cry of all the hunted and the tracked rose to her lips: who would ever have thought of this? Guard against all imaginable danger, lay your plans with the most con-

siderate care, there will always remain, somewhere, the one fatal trifle that damns you.

"I'm glad it's no worse," said Sir George frankly. "To tell you the truth, my dear, I've had a horrid uncertain feeling about it all. I was sure my old friend's little girl would have too much right principle and delicacy of feeling to mix herself up in an affair of this kind: and yet I felt that it would have been very, very hard for you to know how to act if this wretched fellow had thrown himself on your compassion. I suppose there's no danger of his trying to come here now?"

"What, Charles Auburn?" It was Caron's turn to strike in, for neither Dodo nor Roden could find an answer to their mind. "Look here, sir, that's too bad! He may be a convict, but he isn't an outsider."

"I'm glad if you think he has enough remains of gentlemanly feeling——" began Sir George:—"dear me, who's that?"

"Oh, I don't know," Dodo said, feeling as if she were living in a nightmare. "More of those awful warders, I suppose. What can they want? they've looked in every room."

She went with dragging steps to the door, the men crowding after her into the narrow hall. A big, well-set-up man of five-and-forty, once a sergeant of Marines, now wearing the trim dark uniform of a prison warder, stood on the threshold. "What do you want?" said Dodo.

"Miss Chaston, is it, miss?" Dodo bowed. "I'm Chief Warder Wynne, miss, and I'm sorry to say I must ask you to let me have another look over the house. We don't want to cause you any inconvenience——"

"Then why do you? Your men have been all over the house once before to-day."

"Very sorry, miss, but it can't be helped——"

"I should be glad to know what authority you have for this search." It was Sir George who came forward, look-

ing very tall, soldierly, and commanding. "Here's my card, Mr. Wynne: I'm a justice of the peace, and I don't exactly see what object there can be in twice searching a house the size of this. It's absurd to suppose a man could be hidden here without Miss Chaston's knowledge."

"Is this lady related to you, sir, may I ask?"

"Not a relation, but a friend of many years' standing. I look on her as my own daughter."

"Well, then, Sir George—I'll show you my warrant with pleasure; I've shown it to this lady once before to-day; but I reckon you must see for yourself there's good reason for making a pretty thorough search. When ladies come down to places under assumed names——"

"*Dodo!*" cried Sir George.

"Yes, sir: Miss Dodo Carminow, isn't it? and not Miss Dorothea Chaston. Well, naturally, when that comes to light——"

"How did it come to light?" asked Caron. Wynne looked at him thoughtfully.

"I don't know as there's any objection to my telling you, it's bound to come out pretty soon. Miss Carminow was recognized by one of Auburn's mates, that worked in the same gang along of him. He was a Hampshire man, and he knew Auburn before he came here—that is, he'd *seen* him, I should say, and Miss Carminow too! He was in court the day of Auburn's trial. Yesterday afternoon he saw Miss Carminow walkin' along the road where they was all workin': passed quite close to Auburn, she did—on the same side of the road——"

"And on the word of this convicted felon——"

"Pardon me, sir. As soon as the Governor heard the tale—which wasn't till the middle of the morning, when Jones got leave to see him—he 'phoned to Hillingdon to get Miss Carminow's description, and they wired up to the police at Stanton Mere, where I understand the young lady comes from. After we'd heard back we felt we could get a

move on: though I wasn't rightly satisfied in my own mind—it being such an unlikely job—till I heard what you called her just now."

"But it's perfectly impossible she should have anything to do with it" said Sir George, aghast.

"Ah well, you see, that's what we've got to find out," answered Wynne phlegmatically.

Meanwhile Dodo, who was not curious of these details had gone back to the parlor. She was standing idle by the window when Roden came in, and came to her side, and threw his arm round her neck.

"My darling. Is he here? Let me have the truth, Dodo."

"Yes."

"Oh, good heavens! Where?"

"Barred in downstairs. They must break the door down to get in: do you think they will? I'm not sure I can't bluff them even yet—I did this morning."

"They have surer ground to go on now. If they do find him, will there be any chance of denying your connivance?"

"Not in that room."

"It will be an awful scandal."

"I don't care."

"Nor I, much. Does he know they're after him?"

"He knows they searched the house. After they left he wanted to make a dash for it at once and get away across the moors."

"Why?"

"To avoid compromising me, of course: but I forbade him to go before nightfall, at all events. He'd have been caught to a dead certainty."

"Does he know that the place is watched?"

"Not unless he has seen or heard the warders through his window. I haven't gone near him since the morning: I daren't. He is quite reckless, you know, quite mad: he thinks of nothing but the risk to me. He'd give himself up

like a shot to save me from a breath of suspicion. Luckily he can't—that room would ruin me."

"They'll certainly search it."

"In the end: but what I want is to gain time. It is going to be a pitch-dark night. If I can keep Wynne off for an hour and lessen the guard round the house, Charles may yet get away by the window. He has clothes and money, he would have a better chance than most of them—Come in!"

Wynne's knock and entry cut short their murmured talk. He had a couple of subordinates at his heels, and it soon appeared that he meditated an exhaustive search. While he was asking preliminary questions of Dodo, Roden took a cursory view of the state of affairs, and found as he had expected, that Heather Cottage was besieged. There was no cover near it, unless a tool shed, a hedge of lavender, and a few stripped shrubs of lilac could be so described: a couple of wardens with loaded guns were enough to command every door and window. Until it came night, and unless one warder could be called away, it seemed that Auburn had small chance. It was with no slight astonishment that Roden came on Lesbia in the garden, digging a border for dear life: she could not bear to bide within four walls when her boy was in danger. Roden had some notion of speaking to her, but finally turned away. He had nothing to say to Lesbia that could be said within earshot of a listener.

Returning, he found the search in full swing. A warder was posted at the foot of the stairs, while Wynne, and Dodo with him, went over the ground floor. Caron and Sir George had taken refuge in the kitchen, the latter looking much out of place (he had probably not been in a kitchen for many years) as he leaned against the dresser, the former talking in low tones to Jeannie, who had dragged herself down to her settle beside the fire, but was haggard and white enough for any degree of guilt. Roden, in the

restlessness of misery, followed Wynne and Dodo from room to room. He was struck—and so, he thought, was Wynne—by Dodo's ready frankness, her cool unshaken calm.

Ere long Wynne had satisfied himself that on the ground floor not so much as a contraband mouse was to be found. He came back through the kitchen with Dodo. "We'll go downstairs now, miss, if you please."

"Into the cellar? One moment while I get a light."

Jeannie jumped up to fetch a candle, neither she nor Dodo showing any sign of reluctance: and Dodo led the way down, as she had led the way for Auburn not twenty-four hours before. Taking the candle from her, and flashing it over every corner, Wynne looked about him keenly in the half-dark passage: but there was nothing to be seen except an empty packing-case, some soda-water bottles, and a couple of whitewashed doors. "We'll go in here, please, miss," he said, indicating the first of these.

"It's the wine-cellar," said Dodo, unlocking it. "We don't use it: we none of us drink anything but water." Wynne looked in and saw a plain square vault, floor and walls of stone, shuttered window high up at one side. He nodded and withdrew. "Now in here," he said, laying his hand on Auburn's door.

"You must go in there?"

"Why, yes, miss."

"I knew you would want to: I'm sorry, you'll have to break the door down. I haven't got the key."

"Not got the key?"

"No. I've never had a key to it, and as we didn't use it I've never had one made."

Wynne turned and looked at her. "Do you mean to say we can't get in?"

"Only by breaking the door."

"I must see inside somehow," said Wynne. He held up the candle to the door: it was solidly built, and would

cost some pains to break down. Watching Dodo out of the tail of his eye, Wynne gave it a sounding kick with his heavy foot, but there was no sound from within, nor any sign of fear on Dodo's tranquil face. "Sure you haven't got a key that will fit it, miss?"

"No; there are no other locks in the house as big as these."

"Maybe the key of the other door——?" Wynne suggested, thrusting it into the lock: but it would not fit, and Wynne drew back grumbling.

"Can't you get a man to take it off its hinges?" said Dodo. "I don't want Mr. Carpenter's door smashed; I shall have to pay for having it mended. The two rooms are exactly alike."

"Exactly alike, are they?"

"Yes: plain square rooms, built of stone."

"Nothing inside at all?" asked Wynne, again turning to look at her.

"Not a single bottle."

"Indeed, miss? I thought you said you'd never been inside?"

"Oh!" said Dodo, outraged. "Really, Mr. Wynne, if I wanted to tell stories I'd do it better than that! I did not say I'd never been into it, I said I could not get in now. Mrs. Carpenter took me in when I first came to look over the house. I believe the key was lost in their move."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Wynne, relaxing into a smile, "but it did sound a bit queer, you know. Well, look here: I must see inside, but I don't want to give more trouble than what I need. I'll send a message up for one of our men to come down and pick the lock, he'll get it open in no time."

"Why, that's the very thing!" exclaimed Dodo. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

For the sound reason that, if she had, Wynne would have feared a trick, whereas now his doubt of Dodo was hand-

somely shaken. Meanwhile the dusk was falling fast, and Roden recollected that one warder would be called off to carry Wynne's message: let but night come before that door was opened, and there was a chance—a bare chance, and no more—that Auburn might get away to the open moor. But what an issue for Dodo!

"Now, miss, if you please," said Wynne, "we'll go upstairs and finish off, while we can see our way about a bit. It won't take long, being as it's only a formality: he'd never try to hide in the bedrooms in a little place like this."

Leaving one warder posted at the stair foot and a second in the hall, they went up. Heather Cottage was but one story high, and the three rooms all opened off the small, square landing, which was in view of Smith below. Dodo threw open her own door, and Wynne soon satisfied himself that her big press contained only dresses, and that her small bedstead masked nothing more dangerous than a bandbox. Lesbia's chamber was even barer than Miss Carminow's. Finally, he came to the room that had been Jeannie's, where Auburn had supped that night.

"This the last room, miss?" he said, trying the handles—"Dear me, why, this is locked, now!"

"Surely not," said Dodo, surprised.

She tried it, but it would not open. She called down the stairs, "Jean darling, did you lock your door? We want the key."

"Eh?" said Jeannie, appearing from the kitchen. "I never locked it!"

"Then Lesbia must have," said Dodo, perplexed. "Or does it ever stick?"

"I never knew it," said Jeannie, rattling the handle. She bent down to look at the keyhole. "Why, the key's in it—it's locked on the inside!"

"Locked on the inside!" Wynne repeated sharply. "What's that? Stand away there, if you please, miss."

"But there's some mistake!" said Dodo, "why, the men were in here this morning!" She looked round and saw that Caron and Sir George had followed Jeannie, and read on every face the same suspicion: and still no realization of the truth came to her, so prepossessed was she with a different danger. "There is some mistake," she said. "Let me call Lesbia——" Her voice died as she heard Wynne's firm, decisive summons to the prisoner whom he believed to be within.

"—All the windows are commanded, so it's no good your trying to escape. You'd better make up your mind to come quietly, it'll be best for you in the long-run."

There was no sound. Wynne put the women aside and called to Smith. Dodo saw that they were both armed and ready to use their weapons. "Now, then, Auburn," said Wynne, "if you're there, d'you mean to give us the job of breaking open this young lady's door?"

Light firm steps crossed the room: the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Auburn stood on the threshold. He was dressed in his convict rags, and after the unspeakable strain of twelve hours in hiding he looked as Dodo had never imagined him—demoralized, and degraded, and cowed. Wynne raised his revolver and covered him: but that precaution was unnecessary. He walked out into the middle of the waiting group, and held out his hands, crossed at the wrists. "I am willing to come quietly, sir," he said

"That's sensible of you," said Wynne, slipping the handcuffs on with a deft professional touch. "You've given enough trouble as it is. I should just like to know how you got into that room, though. Where were you when Mr. Brown came round this morning?"

"I can't tell you, sir."

"Oh, you can't, can't you?"

"No, sir. I shall not give you or any one the details of my escape. But one thing you'll bear me out in, Mr. Wynne, and that is that this lady was not responsible for

my appearance." He had not once looked at Dodo, who stood motionless, her hands clasped against her breast, where in the dark of the moor fog Auburn's head had lain. "It was a—a surprise to her."

"You infernal scamp!" Sir George burst out, "how dare you come here?"

Roden struck in to give Auburn his cue. "Miss Carminow's was the house of all others you were bound to keep away from."

"I know that."

"I'm glad you have the decency to admit it, sir! I consider that you've behaved infamously badly. I suppose you meant to try and work on Miss Carminow's pity?"

"Even so, Sir George."

"I wonder you're not ashamed——"

"I should have said he was ashamed," said Caron; "rather obviously so."

Auburn's lips framed "Mercy." He was visibly near to sobbing. Sir George shrugged his shoulders and turned away, true to the British principle that one cannot hit a man when he is down. Roden's glance for Caron was one of bitter anger, and he was going up to essay a word of encouragement to the beaten man when Wynne checked him sharply. "That's enough, sir," he said. "We can't stay here all night. This has been a little bit of a surprise all round, but all's well that ends——"

The words were cut short by a quick movement from Auburn, who had forgotten his manacled wrists. "Oh! catch her, one of you!" he cried, "the child's dying!"

Jeannie had sunk quietly down on the floor. Sir George and Roden lifted her between them, and got her into her room just as Lesbia came up the stairs. She stood on the landing, taking in every detail of the scene: Dodo's tragic quiet, Auburn handcuffed between the officers, Jeannie insensible on her bed with the blood flowing from her mouth. There was woe enough in that sight to turn any

woman to stone, and like stone Lesbia stood, while Caron ran to get water and Roden loosened Jeannie's clothes. At length Dodo touched Lesbia's arm. "Jeannie's dying, I think," she said.

Lesbia's hands went up to her head, and she stood pressing them against either temple, but still she did not speak.

"Lucky Jeannie, don't you think?" Dodo added with the travesty of a smile.

Wynne eyed her doubtfully. "I was going to ask you just to step up to the prison with me, miss, and see the Governor: but I dare say, if you prefer it, he'd wait till——"

"Till she's dead? Oh, she may not die for a long time, and her sister will be with her. I'll come with you if you want me," Dodo answered. She stooped to wipe the lips of the sick girl and pressed her own to them. "Good-bye, old Jeannie. I'll send some one for a doctor, Lesbia."

So in the dark of the November twilight they left Heather Cottage: Auburn handcuffed between warders, Sir George with Dodo's hand drawn through his arm, Roden and Caron together, some little way behind.

"Events have gone too rapidly for me," said Caron. "I won't ask for details: but tell me this, at all events—was Auburn much to blame for coming here?"

"Rather: but he's made amends."

"Gave himself up, in fact?"

"Virtually."

"His story will need some patching."

"They'll suspect Dodo: but I think they can't prove anything."

"Heaven be praised! We don't want a scandal." Roden shrugged his shoulders. "What's the matter with you?"

"Are you blind?"

"To him? No. Running plays the devil with a man, doesn't it?" Roden nodded. "But, after all, he's no worse off than he was before."

“It has broken him.”

Caron winced away from the grim words. “He’s had bad luck all through. He’ll weather this as he’s weathered the rest.”

“I wish to God he were dead,” said Roden, “—or I were.”

XXX.

IT was New Year's Eve, and the snow lay thick on the ground: a night of frost, so placid that Dodo's candle burned steadily beside her open window. Nearly two months had gone by since the recapture of Auburn: a time as dark and still in Dodo's life as the wintry landscape itself.

She had escaped scot-free. There was no evidence to prove her implicated, and for Auburn's sake she took care not to incriminate herself. Auburn swore, and Wynne bore him out, that no one could have been more painfully surprised than Dodo when he opened Jeannie's door. Not another syllable could be wrung from him, and the conclusion to which Major Topham came was that the prisoner, known to be a rich man, had contrived to bribe a warder. Not that the Governor was satisfied, for there were various points, and notably the meeting in the road, that struck him as suspicious: but Wynne stood up for Dodo's innocence (thereby heaping coals of fire on Dodo's head), and in the lack of direct proof Major Topham, after a cross-examination in which he was less cool than the suspect, had to let her go.

Auburn himself was punished, but not severely. He had a spell of solitary confinement on bread and water, lost his remission marks and his fourth year's privileges, and was put into grotesque parti-colored clothes which made him feel like a clown in an ugly pantomime: no undue penalty. That he was transferred to Portland early in December was due to Major Topham's fear of an outbreak upon Jimmy Jones, who gloried impenitently in what he had

done. Both Auburn and Dodo, in fact, might be said to have got off cheaply. None the less it seemed to both that the very springs of life were broken. Dodo's lot was the unremitting anguish of pity: while Auburn, losing in the strong gentleness of Hugh Rose his last link with the outer world, heard night by night in the dash of the waves on the rocks under his great sea-prison a summons to despair. At that time he slept as little as he could. Better far to lie awake in the dark, looking death in the face, than to sleep, and dream of open waters, and hills bare to the wind, and the living touch of Dodo's arms about his neck. He who does not sleep does not wake.

As soon as she was allowed, Dodo left Menval. She parted from Lesbia and Jeannie without a pang, although Jeannie was so ill that no one thought she would live the year out. Dodo's one strong feeling seemed to be a distaste for Heather Cottage. Sir George insisted on taking her home with him, and she yielded, as she would have yielded if they had ordered her off to prison. Roden was glad, for the air teemed with scandal, and he knew that her name could have no stauncher and no abler champion than Sir George, although, or because, he had heard from Dodo's lips the whole truth. The plain, honest country gentleman had a strain of chivalry in him, which it was Dodo's good luck to set on fire, and by its light he attained to a clearer perception than one would have thought possible to a man of middle age and fixed standards. He gave her credit not for love only but for faith—"After all, if she thinks the fellow innocent!" he said, and shrugged his shoulders. He saw, as Lesbia had seen, that that was for Dodo the crux of the situation.

Such a man was not to be deterred by scandal. "We must make the women take her up," he said to Roden. "Get the poor dear child to come back with me, and I'll guarantee there shall be no scandal. I should like to hear anybody say a word against her when she's under Magdalen's

wing!" Sir George as he said this looked quite unlike the normal Sir George who rode and shot and harried poachers all the year round at Trevor Hall. He was a man of weight in the county, while Lady Trevor, born Magdalen Sele, was related by blood to half the northern aristocracy, so that the plan was a sound one. "Good," said Dodo when it was laid before her. "I'll go and be whitewashed." So she went back to the grey village ringed by the silence of the Plain, to the tall spired church under whose shadow her father lay asleep: to the gossip of the market-place and the curious sympathy of Mabel Blandford, and Lady Trevor's motherly kindness, and the strong love of Grace. She had not been away six months in all.

For some while they left her quiet to readjust herself to life: but Dodo was ever a fighter, and the patient acceptance of pain was no part of her plan. From the death-like apathy of Menval, through a time of isolation and the grinding wheels of thought, she struggled painfully back to the living world again. But though it was the old world it was not the old Dodo.

"Dodo, father wants to have a few people here on New Year's Eve. Do you mind?"

"Why should I?"

"Only, if we do, you'll have to come down to dinner."

"Very well," said Dodo after a short silence: "am I to do Samson and the Philistines?"

"Don't see the point—oh yes, I do. No, you shan't make sport for them, though you will be rather coolly received, I'm afraid: most of them think it was awfully wicked of you and awfully mean of Charles. But you'll have to face them some time or other, so can't you buck up and do it now?"

"Dear, old, diplomatic Gracie!" said Dodo, half smiling. "Very well, I'll come and face them if you want me to."

After this sort was Dodo encouraged to return to society, and now, on this white New Year's Eve, she was steeling

herself to meet the ordeal for Auburn's sake, and still more for the Trevors'. Dodo had taken pains with her appearance. Her plentitude of fair hair was drawn up in one silken wave from the nape of her neck to a coronet of braids, and a slender wreath of white lilac was twined in it like a ribbon. Round her throat she wore a collar of pearl and emerald, Auburn's gift at Cæsar's Camp, and the green fire of her betrothal ring glowed on her left hand. Her dress had cost her some thought. Black she had considered and rejected, as too plainly traditional: yet she was debarred by her mourning from wearing colors. There remained white: and in white accordingly Dodo had clad herself, like a girl going to her first communion or a young bride. White may, however, be either childlike or mature, and Dodo had chosen the latter type in a French gown, filmy and clinging, with glittering embroideries and long, pale, extravagant lilac-trails. And very fair she looked, and very young! The years had heightened, not lessened, Dodo's charm. To the fine slenderness and pale bloom of her real youth they had added the qualities proper to ripper life with its fullness of experience, the marks of character without which a woman's beauty is but a lifeless mask.

There is a touch of wizardry in all mirrors. As Dodo stood leaning forward, candle in hand, to peer at the white vision shining out of the dark glass, it needed no strong imagination to conjure up the eyes of her lover watching her from the shadows. But this imagination was so strong that Dodo looked back over her shoulder, and could hardly believe that he was not in the room. The sense of his bodily presence was as vivid as if the very breath of his passion had fanned her cheek.

She went to the window and drew back the curtain. It was a cloudy night, but not dark: there was a crescent moon, and the snow lying thick and pure and pale over lawn and wood shed its own illumination everywhere. Far off she had a glimpse of a dark, triangular slip of steel which

she knew to be the lake: beyond that, vague, formless, cloud-like heights where the snow lay only in crannies rose up in a long curve against the paler obscurity of the clouds. Reckless of her bare shoulders Dodo leaned out of the open window, straining her eyes towards the south. Below her was the porch with its broad steps, and the long dark slope of the avenue where they had all been gathered on the evening of Auburn's arrest. Her last sight of him had been at the gate of the prison, when he was led off to his cell: he had turned and looked back at her then, once, for the last time: what a look! She never could think of his eyes at that moment without the phrase of the old seer rising in her mind, "They shall go down quick into the pit." But his lips moved, and his last words, read by her only, were meant to comfort her: "Remember, it was well worth while." Not so had those ghostly eyes looked at her from the dark mirror, but with the old fire of passion, the old relentless, merry sense of power. She thought, "What can have brought him back to me, as he used to be, in the old shape, before they broke him? I wonder what he would think of me if he were here in the flesh," and a vivid presentiment of what he would have thought, and said, and done, lit the torch in her eyes and made her blush.

"Are you ready, old girl? I tapped twice, and couldn't make you hear."

Grace was standing in the doorway, uncertain, apologetic: Grace tricked out in pink satin, with a skirt that was rather long behind and rather short in front. Why were Gracie's evening gowns always short in front? "Are *you* ready?" Dodo retorted, pointing to an unpremeditated pin. "I hope not."

"Always do feel an idiot in evening dress," Grace acknowledged mournfully, "but that can't be helped, I'm used to it. Besides, you can do pretty-pretty for both of us. Dear, you are rather transcendent to-night—do you know? What have you been doing to yourself?"

"There's my rouge-pot," said Dodo, laying her hand on the Farquhar portrait of Auburn, which stood, framed, on her table. "Do you believe in ghosts, Gracie? I saw him just now."

"Oh, Dodo!"

"Do you think it could mean that he is dead? It was a very much alive ghost," said Dodo, smiling queerly. "He came and looked over my shoulder into the looking-glass: not a tragic, beaten Charles, as I last saw him at Princetown, but the Charles of four years ago with his trick of doing what he liked first and apologizing afterwards—or not at all."

"Oh, Dodo, how can you?"

"My dear, if I could believe he was dead, I'd sing a Te Deum. Come, we must go down. Has any one arrived yet?"

"Only Bernard. He politely told me that if he'd known how deep the snow was nothing on earth would have induced him to stir."

"Who takes me in to dinner?"

"Val Attwood: mother and I thought you'd like him, he's such a dear fellow and so easy to talk to."

"How good you all are to me!" Dodo said, as they went down the stairs. "Don't think me ungrateful: I can't thank you now, and I can't play up to you decently, but I will as soon as I can, truly I will! Meanwhile, you can't think what a comfort it is to know you'll honor all my overdrafts!" Grace's reply was to throw her arm round Dodo's neck and kiss her with the old boyish tenderness. "It's so nice to have some one to be selfish to."

"I don't think you're selfish, Dodo."

Dodo thought of Jeannie, fighting out the end of her life under the grey night sky, and of Lesbia left alone in her anguish to watch the parting soul. "Never mind," she said. "I'll now be sensible, for a change."

She followed Grace into the big drawing-room, lit by a

blaze of electric light, which had only recently been laid on, and possessed all the charm of a new toy for Sir George. Mild Lady Trevor, elegant and simple in her flowing grey silk, was lamenting this infatuation in under-tones to Lady Richarda Harewood, for the other guests had arrived during Grace's absence, and it was close on seven. Sir George, on the hearth-rug, held in talk two or three of the men. It was but a small and informal gathering: Mabel Blandford and her father (Eric was pre-engaged), Louisine and Val Attwood, Mr. Saltau of the Manor and his pretty French bride, and Bernard Carminow, who had walked up from the Chantry Farm and was more than usually out of temper as a result: these, with Roden and Caron, who were staying in the house, completed the tale, and all had known one another too long to be at a loss for conversation. Dodo alone, by virtue of her six months' absence and all that had happened in it, ranked as a novelty: and there was a very slight but significant movement in the room as she came in. Many of those present looked up, involuntarily or furtively. Lady Trevor swam across the room and took her hand. "I think you know every one, dear, except Mrs. Saltau, don't you?" she exclaimed. Dodo was led towards Mrs. Saltau, a French Royalist in Dresden china, but had to linger to shake hands with Lady Ricky, and meanwhile Mrs. Saltau jumped up and came to meet her, and with a quaint, caressing sincerity caught and held Dodo's fingers for a moment. "Oh!" she said, "how charming of you to be last! My husband and I feared never to arrive, the carriage came so slow, so slow! once it was up to the ankles in snow——"

"If Lady Trevor will introduce me to Miss Carminow," this was Mr. Saltau's pleasant, clear voice as he strolled forward from the fireside group, "I shall have pleasure in explaining that when my wife says ankles it is axles she has in her mind——"

Certainly it was no hard ordeal, this return to society under Lady Trevor's motherly wing. In a few minutes they

went in to dinner, and Dodo found herself seated between Val Attwood and Mr. Saltau, while Roden and Louisine faced them across the table, which was decorated with a low tracery of pale blooms and dark leaves, so that conversation could be carried on freely over it. And the talk ran with an easy flow. Lady Richarda was telling scandalous legends to Sir George, who lent an obliging ear and an eye that had a twinkle in it. Louisine and Roden, whose rapid intimacy on the night of the Blandfords' dance four years before had run in Grace Trevor's mind when she was drafting her couples, were profiting by her generosity to renew their old flirtation. Mabel Blandford was happy with Caron, better worth her notice since he had blossomed into celebrity, and Caron was no less happy to listen to the lady's views on the Academy, which struck him as idiotic enough to be funny. Handsome Val Attwood, of whom Roden had once said that it was hard to understand how a man could be so very well bred and not a fool, talked with his inimitable lightness of Roden's Indian career and his own doings in town, and never for one moment let it be seen that he was aware of the need of discretion. It was all so natural and so easy that the youth in Dodo would have been content to drift with the current, but she could not: the isolation of a great sorrow was still on her, and its curse of clear vision. She was no coward: indeed, as Roden remarked to Grace, "Our Dodo can usually face the music." She chatted easily to Val, and laughed over his sketch of an early Territorial field-day. But she listened to her own laughter with a strange sense of duality, which Val, whose own Army career had been cut short by a shameful scandal imperfectly hushed up, alone of the company could have explained to her. Of such irretrievable wounds a few die, many are healed: others, of a harder courage, merely grow familiar with pain.

"Yes, the Ardennes for me," Amyas Saltau said in his soft voice, tinged with a Devonshire accent and marked by

a quaint, slight stammer. "They're a s-sweet spot. All fir-trees, you know, and rivers with stepping-stones, and porters who don't expect to be tipped, and that sort of thing."

"Idyllic," Dodo nodded. "But I'd really rather go to Paris."

"See Paris, see the world," said Val: "it is the world, in miniature."

"Paris is fascinating and wicked: at least so I've always been told," said Dodo. "Don't shake my illusions, please, I want to keep them."

"Then she'd better not go, had she?" Grace chimed in across the table. "It's the only way to keep one's illusions, my dear."

"I don't agree with you," dissented Amyas Saltau. "When you are a few years younger, Grace, you won't be such a pessimist."

"I don't see any sense in that," said Grace, disgusted: "do you, Bernard?"

"Not much," said Bernard.

Dodo plunged hurriedly into the slight, surprised pause that followed—as it so often used to follow—Bernard's reply. "I don't care for illusions that have to be kept in cotton-wool, do you, Mr. Attwood?"

"He hasn't had any since the Liberals came in," Mr. Saltau began to explain, but his attention was reclaimed at this point by Lady Ricky, who had been trying to preach Free Trade to Mr. Blandford, and was infuriated by his affability to the fair sex. Val went on, "It really does save trouble to resign oneself to facts. As long as I hoped we weren't going to the dogs, I was harassed by anxiety: now that I know we are, I am agreeably calm, and able to reflect that after all we shall take ages getting there."

"Isn't that rather a cowardly doctrine?" said Dodo.

"Possibly," said Val, helping himself to olives. "It's mine."

Sir George leaned forward to ask Lady Richarda whether a date was yet fixed for the hunt ball, a topic in which most of the table joined except Louisine and Roden, who were deep in reminiscence. "I remember your sister so well," Louisine was saying in her low, effective drawl, "the night of the Blandfords' dance. She was looking so awfully pretty that evening."

"So were—I mean," said Roden, "you were dressed in yellow."

"Civilized people call it amber," said Louisine, unmoved. "It wasn't a bad dance. You behaved awf'ly badly."

"Yes, didn't we?" said Roden. "Do you remember the Moorish Inglenook in the Mauve Saloon?"

"Ridiculous!" murmured Louisine. She left the application vague. "Your sister had a good time too, didn't she?"

Roden's brows drew together. "Oh, quite. You mean her engagement?"

"Of course I do. Only I hadn't the cheek to say it," candidly acknowledged Louisine. "So I thought I'd hint at it instead, which is really much more vulgar. I admire her type, you know, immensely: it's so uncommon. I can't think how she could do it."

"Do what?"

"Dig a subterranean passage, or whatever it was she did do. Oh, wasn't it that? Some one told me it was—I'm so sorry. But it was awf'ly noble of her, I'm sure, whatever it was. She's—isn't she——?" Louisine hesitated, a rare thing with her, for she had been brought up to negotiate the stiffest of conversational fences without faltering: but the light, keen, mocking eyes confused her.

"She is," said Roden.

"Is what?"

"Engaged to him still."

The unready color sprang to Louisine's brown cheek:

her hand fell for a moment on Roden's arm. "Oh, I *am* sorry!" she said. "Captain Carminow, will you believe that it wasn't altogether impertinent curiosity—what I said?"

"What was it then?" asked Roden.

"I *am* sorry."

"For her?"

"And for you. You're very much changed."

"Am I? You're the first person that has told me so," said Roden. He leaned back in his chair, looking so desperately weary, so far out of harmony with the situation, that Louisine's social instinct woke up and she dashed into a lively monologue to cover his deficiencies.

"You don't think people look dull, do you?" Grace asked confidentially of Bernard Carminow. "I'm not a bit of good at keeping things going, I do wish I were."

"Dodo's happy anyhow," said Bernard sardonically. "Look at his expression! I fancy she could have him any day if she chose to drop the handkerchief. He's just the sort of sentimental rotter to like her all the better for having made a fool of herself for another man."

"As if she'd have him!"

"More fool she. We might have a double wedding," Bernard grinned, inclining his head very slightly towards Roden and Louisine. "*That* would prosper with a little encouragement—what?"

"I don't think so. I don't know if he's in earnest: she can hardly be. She'll never marry a poor man."

"Ah! you don't like that notion."

"That's hateful of you, Bernard."

"Dare say: I don't care if it is. It's enough to make any man savage to see a woman he likes chucking herself away over a chap who hasn't got the sense to thank her for it."

The fierce pain that underlay Bernard's low, impatient tones consoled Grace to some extent for their remarkable

impropriety. "Well, you needn't talk about it now, anyhow," she pointed out. "Isn't Roden well to-night? He looks awfully seedy."

"There's nothing wrong with him."

"Oh, nothing—except that he's getting as thin as a hop-pole! He's never really been himself since——"

"Since what?"

"Don't be aggravating! you know what I mean."

"Good gracious, yes!" said Bernard, leaning back in his chair. "We all know, don't we? It's quite an Auburn dinner, in fact—though I'll go bail I'm the first that's said his name. Well, Grace, I'm not given to humbug! and all I can say is, I wish the fellow would cut his throat, or catch typhoid——"

"Eh? ? What's that?" Sir George bent his brows impatiently. "Some one to see me? Rubbish, Thompson! how can I see anybody to-night?"

Thompson, the discreet butler, whispered into Sir George's ear.

"Well, tell her to wait, then. I won't see her now, and that's the long and short of it."

Thompson withdrew dissatisfied, and Sir George turned with an apology to Mrs. Saltau.

"Says her name's Burnet, and she must speak to me on the spot. Extraordinarily unreasonable these women are, to be sure—they always come in the middle of my dinner!"

"Alas, poor women!" said Mrs. Saltau, with her quaint French shrug and movement of the hands. "And you who are an Englishman!"

"No, no," Sir George protested, "that's too bad! Eh, what is it *now*?"

"If you please, Sir George," Thompson's harassed whisper was rather louder and less confidential in his distress, and several at that end of the table looked up in amusement, "we don't know what to do——"

"Which of you here is Sir George Trevor?"

Dodo got to her feet, and Val Attwood sprang up to catch her if she fell. Roden leaned back in his chair, colorless, lifeless but for his eyes. It was Lesbia.

She pushed past the servants: no one dared to stop her. She was in black, and had nothing over her shoulders but a black shawl: the snow lay thick on it, and in the folds of her dress. She stood with folded arms, composed, powerful, bearing the brunt of all those eyes that tried to read her pale face, and could not.

"I came for justice, gentlemen and ladies, and that's a thing that ought not to be kept waiting. It has waited already four years and more, but now the time has come when I can speak out. Which of you is Sir George?"

"I am."

"And you're a magistrate?"

"Certainly."

"Then I give myself into your hands, sir, for the murder of the late Sir Charles Auburn."

"Good heavens! the woman must be out of her mind."

"I am not. I have been nearly, though: waiting, waiting in the dawn for the spirit to pass. Listen, then—for I see some here that long for truth as dying men long for water. It was me that killed him. I held my tongue as long as my sister Jean lived, but she died this morning, and now I can tell my tale."

No one had any idea of interrupting her, and after a short pause Lesbia went on:

"Long years ago, before I had cried all the beauty out of this face of mine, I was a good-looking girl. I was maid to Lady Auburn then, and Sir Charles took a fancy to me. He used to come sneaking up when her back was turned to make love to me. I cared for that just as much as you'd mind a fly on your face. He never dared meddle with me.

"When she died, she left her babe to me to take care of. I lived on at Auburn till he grew to be a man, and then I left it, and settled in a cottage pretty close. It was my

father's, and his father's before him, and I loved it: and little I thought of the bane in the race, the black stock growing hard by. There my half-sister Jeannie came to me: and there she grew up a bonnier girl than I had ever been.

"She was too bonny. Sir Charles cast his eye on her. I did not know it, I did not fear it, and God never said a word. Well, He knows His own business best, we must suppose. It was a lonely place, out of earshot of neighboring cottages. I'm sorry to trouble ladies' ears with such a tale, but such things do get done in the world, and if God can bear with them so can we, I think. . . . One day, when I came home . . .

"My Jeannie was a flower as spotless as the lily, and like a lily when you set your foot on it she never lifted up her head again but just faded and faded away. She was never strong: and by and by she sickened and took to her bed. Consumption, they called it: and so it was, but the mind was consumed before the body. I wanted no vengeance yet: I could leave that to God. Eternity is a blessed thought, and I knew there was a bright blazing mansion getting ready for that man in the kingdom of his father. And I was not going to bring down my bonny Jean's pride and lay it in the dust for fools to make a mock of it.

"But one night, when she was very ill and I sitting beside her and listening to her pitiful talk, there came over me a feeling that I had to speak to him. It was the fifteenth of July, nineteen three. When she dropped asleep I stole out, and went up the avenue, walking on the grass that no one might see my steps. I knew where he'd be. I came in by the open window and found him sitting over his wine. It was not much I said, but it was well chosen. He got up: but he was too drunk to be angry. What was next? Why, this mad brute, that had trampled out my Jean's life—this dirty dog was on his drunken legs trying to kiss me! Said he thought I was 'quite handsome in my temper.'

"There was a cane lying on the table, I never saw whose. I struck him with it—only once. I doubt I never beat carpets so hard as I beat that man over his drunken face. He fell right on the ground at my feet: then I knew what Jael felt like.

"I turned him over, and made sure he was dead. I went out by the open window and stole back home. But, as I was going in by the garden gate, a young gentleman stepped up to me and asked me had I seen young Mr. Auburn up at the house. That was the first news I had that he was about. I said no: and then seeing he was a gentleman, and looking forward to what was to come, I asked him would he promise not to say he had seen me out of my door that night, for, I said, 'a woman's good name hangs on it.' He gave the promise, and kept it loyally, from which I now release him, that he may witness to my truth. There he sits." She pointed to Roden.

"You knew this, and did not tell?"

Roden raised his clear eyes to Dodo's face. "I had promised."

"Well, now, you can finish for yourself," said Lesbia. "I did what I thought was best for my boy. I fancied no one knew he was down, and so I made an excuse to pack him off by a back way. It was as a snare to his feet. All that I did to help him has been to drag him down. I saw him taken to prison, I heard the death-sentence read over him: the babe that had lain on my breast, the boy I loved better, far better than my own life; better than Jeannie's self, I sometimes think. But I held my tongue. The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children. My Jean was innocent, and wronged to death: and it was his father did it. I would have seen him hanged, but I never would have spoken. But if they had hanged him, when Jeannie died I would have spoken just the same."

She ended as composedly as she had begun, and stood waiting, wrapped in her shawl, from which the snow had

all melted, and was running down on the floor. Dodo was still on her feet. Roden rose and faced her, white as a dying man, but unshaken.

"I was sure I could have saved him if I had spoken."

"Let me alone."

Roden bowed slightly (an odd thing to do to one's sister, Grace thought), and said no more. Grace glanced round the disordered table, but of what every one was saying or doing she got only a fitful and clouded view. A moment later Sir George stood up.

"I am sure," he said in his low, well-bred voice, with the touch of dignity that always made Grace feel proud of him, "you all know us too well to think us inhospitable if we ask you to excuse us to-night. After what has passed, it would be a poor sort of evening that we could invite you to share."

There followed confusion and a murmur of farewells and much hunting of cloaks and summoning of carriages. In the middle of it all Grace found Roden standing by her, with a glass of wine in his hand. "I wish you would make the child drink this."

"Thank you, Roddy," Grace answered, "you think of everything."

She carried the wine to Dodo, who had thrown a window open and was looking far out into the night.

"Drink it up, darling, it will do you good."

Dodo put the glass from her. "No: it's Roden's. I saw him pour it out."

Grace had to wait a moment to control her indignation. "I think you are mad, Dodo. What Roden saw proved nothing at all."

"Not enough to hang Lesbia: but ample to have saved Charles."

"I don't believe it. If it was so, Roden could not break his promise."

"No, he wanted to save his soul."

"As if Roden cared about his soul!" said Grace scornfully. "You're very unjust, Dodo."

"Am I?" said Dodo. "Let me alone, Grace." She turned on Grace with her wide level eyes, so like Roden's in their passionless brilliancy. "You don't know Roden, and I never did till now. He is the eternal fanatic, the type that kills men in the name of God. He has broken Charles' life as you break a piece of stick: and he is my brother, and he loves me."

XXXI.

UNDER an icy blue January sky, Portland, the great stone fortress, rose up foursquare on its stone foreland. Rock and prison were united into one vast mass by the thick pure mantle of the snow. Every crocket, every beading, every sheltered sill stood out black as jet against the dazzling mask. The sea roared against the foot of the prison, the wind raved round it, and the air was rife with stinging flakes of salt. The prisoners shivered in their cramped cubicles of corrugated iron—seven feet high, seven long, and four feet wide—and were at pains not to set their bare feet on the naked slate floor. At night Auburn lay awake, too cold to sleep, and heard his neighbors all around him grumbling and swearing in their ill-swung hammocks. It was a frozen Inferno. Many years after, the chill of an east wind by a winter seashore used to bring back to him those nights in the iron cells of Portland.

It was eight in the morning, and the sun was rising red out of a bank of fog. Auburn had eaten his porridge and rolled up his hammock and blankets, and sat idle on his stool, waiting to be let out. His mates had all gone to chapel half an hour ago and were now at work. Why he alone should have been left in his cell he neither knew nor cared. Inaction made him deadly cold, however, and he was not sorry when at length a warder walked in and told him, in the curt Portland manner, that he was to come at once to see the Governor.

Almost too stiff to walk, Auburn followed his guide down the long flagged corridors, through doors that unlocked and relocked behind him, into homelier regions of carpeted

staircase and papered wall: he had forgotten the look of such things. His months at Portland seemed longer than the years at Princetown. A great gap intervened between life in the sea-prison and life before his escape.

At length he was brought into the Governor's room, large and comfortably furnished, and brightened by a fire burning in the open grate, the warmth of which was reviving. The Governor himself sat in a high chair before a big table. He looked up as Auburn came in; and the prisoner was surprised by the expression of Major White's rather narrow, well-cut face. The stern and cool official had developed inexplicably into a human being whose eyes conveyed interest and sympathy—one might almost say, respect. Auburn, keenly on the defensive, and conscious of the presence of the deputy-governor and of one or two minor officials who eyed him with more of curiosity and less of good-breeding, waited in the prisoner's patience, collecting his manhood to face the unknown ordeal.

"Will you sit down, Sir Charles?"

Such a form of address was so unfamiliar and so unlikely that Auburn thought it could not be meant for him. But one of the bystanders, in whom he recognized the prison doctor, a kind though coarse-natured man of the name of Walker, pushed forward a chair near the fire, and taking Auburn by the arm put him into it. Auburn sat down, but he was horribly embarrassed. In prison routine he had got used to the parti-colored clothes, one leg and one arm brown and one mustard-yellow, and he could work, or march, or stand up at ease in them: but to sit down in a civilized room and before gentlemen in this harlequin dress made him wretchedly conscious of his degradation. Nor did it please him to intercept the silent question and answer that flashed over him between Major White and Captain Fanning and the blue-eyed, red-bearded Ezra Walker.

"I've sent for you this morning, Sir Charles," began Major White slowly, "to break a piece of news to you."

"Yes, sir," said Auburn.

"You need not call me sir."

Auburn raised his eyebrows and simply said nothing.

"You don't ask what my news is," said White. He had picked up an ivory paper-knife and was bending it about in his fingers, unmistakably nervous, the autocrat of fifty!

"You're not very inquisitive, are you?"

"No," said Auburn dryly.

"I may tell you that it is good news."

Auburn replied by a shrug.

"So good that I'm afraid to tell you without a certain amount of preparation. Try to make up your mind to hear something very surprising and, I hope, very agreeable."

And still no inkling of the truth dawned on Auburn. White's face was grave and dark as he turned to his second in command. "What's one to say to the fellow?"

"Oh, let him have it," said Fanning curtly. Then Major White laid down his paper-knife.

"The news I have for you is the only news you would probably be able to call good. Circumstances have come to light which prove that you have been the victim of a wretched miscarriage of justice. You have received the formality of a free pardon, and you're at liberty to walk out of my gates as soon as—How about a glass of brandy, Walker?"

"He'll be all right in ten seconds," said Walker gruffly. Auburn had risen and caught at Fanning's arm to steady himself: his hand went up to the throat of his jacket.

"I'm all right," he said: and reeled, and would have gone down on the floor if Fanning had been less quick or strong. He did not faint outright, but he could not stand, and for some minutes the room was quite dark, and Walker's irritable, "Air—give him air," and Fanning's heretical, "Oh, hang the system!" came to him from a long way off. When he came to himself he was lying on the sofa,

his head supported on Fanning's arm. Auburn sat up and swung his feet to the ground.

"What a fool I am! I'm all right now, thanks very much. What's it all about? I don't understand."

"No need," said Fanning curtly. "You had better go into the next room and change your clothes."

Auburn got up, but he was still so dazed that Fanning had to grasp his arm. What followed was never very clear to Auburn's mind. He was dimly aware of being taken into another room and helped—himself well-nigh helpless—into new clothes that sat very loose upon him, and yet felt, after the shapeless convict garb, close and constrained: afterwards came some signing and reading of papers. His next clear memory was that of shaking hands with Fanning and White, who expressed the traditional valedictory wish that he might never see him again.

"Thank you," said Auburn mechanically. "Where am I to go?—I mean," he corrected himself quickly, "is no one here to meet he?"

"Only I."

It was Roland, who had been ushered up in time to catch the last words. He held out both hands, and Auburn took them. For a moment they stood silent, looking into each other's faces: with anguish of regret on the one side, with unshaken fidelity on the other.

"I never believed you."

"Never mind. What's the odds?"

"I knew you would forgive me, Auburn."

"All right, don't bother."

This was all that ever passed between them on the point. Auburn soon forgot that he had ever had anything to forgive: but Roland Carew walked the more humbly all his days because he had failed his friend in need. It was no time to think of that now, however. Auburn had shaken off his faintness and was himself again: very white, very languid, but cool and steady. They went down together

into the courtyard, where a number of warders pressed forward to shake hands with Auburn and wish him good luck, for there are kindly hearts in as well as out of a convict prison, and they were all sorry for the innocent man. At the gate a big motor-car was waiting, its steelwork flashing in the sun. Little more was said till Auburn and Roland were in it side by side, and the great car began to move, slowly at first, but rapidly gathering speed, along the flat road that connected Portland Prison with the mainland. Even then it was with trite enough speech that Roland turned to his friend.

"I brought a fur coat for you, old man: hadn't you better get into it?"

"It's a cold morning," Auburn assented, obeying: and he added, as he turned up the collar round his throat, "I haven't been warm for months."

"You're looking frightfully ill."

"I shall get all right in a couple of days. Where are we going?"

"To Yeovil. I thought you would like to lunch there and get a wash and a shave, and then go on by train in the afternoon."

"Go on?"

"To Stanton Mere. Miss Carminow is at the Trevors', and they want you to go there too."

"I suppose I can do so, can't I?"

"Can?"

"Give me an hour or so to get used to the idea of freedom."

Roland's hand clenched like a vice round the rim of the steering wheel: he bit his lip and said nothing.

"This ain't a bad car," Auburn said presently. "I'll take her over by and by and get your license endorsed."

Roland smiled. "As you've done before. I'm glad it's a sunny morning."

"Yes: it's morning still. What's the time?"

“Half-past nine.”

“Is that all? An hour and a half ago I was sitting in my cell wondering whether I should live to see another summer. Oh, the longing for wide spaces, Roland!—You didn’t happen to bring a bun with you by any chance? I’m ravenous: you never get enough to eat down there.”

Roland dragged out a basket and took from it a packet of sandwiches and a silver flask of wine. Auburn seized the former and began to eat, as he had said, ravenously. “Here, drink this,” Roland said, pouring him out a silver cup of wine, while the car, on first speed, ambled along a broad piece of road. “It won’t hurt you, it’s Heidsieck ’84.”

Auburn held it up to the light and waited a moment, looking all round him at the wide, white countryside, the sparkling blue sky, the sun, still reddened by fog, darting down his bright arrows over a pale blue Arctic sea. “I drink to the health of the good God,” he said with perfect gravity. “It’s not bad champagne, either. Now tell me how it has all come about, for I am in the dark, you know.”

“Do you want to hear now? It will be a shock to you.”

“My good but unimaginative Roland, I’m not a sufferer from heart disease!”

“I know, you’re much cooler than I thought you would be. To tell you the truth, we were all rather nervous about you, this coming so suddenly after such a long strain: but if it hadn’t been kept dark up to the last moment we could never have dodged the reporters, so there’s some virtue in red-tape.”

“If a reporter comes near me I’ll brain him,” said Auburn. “No, I won’t: I’ll give ’em all different interviews and let ’em fight it out. How’s that, Roley-Poley?” This ancient nickname, which dated from the days of “Pop.,” made them both laugh. Small tricks of speech or thought are the last things to be affected by a great mental and moral disturbance: the witty man will coin phrases in

an earthquake, the sententious man will prose himself into his very grave, and so perhaps Auburn's careless levity was the straw on the whirlpool, the humor that survives when reflection and feeling break down. He brushed his hand across his forehead. "Your champagne's getting into my head! Tell me the tale before I'm too drunk to understand. Who did it?"

Roland judged it wiser not to cross him. "It was Lesbia."

"Who?"

"Lesbia Burnet."

"*Lesbia Burnet!*"

"There, I knew it would upset you!"

"No, no," said Auburn impatiently. "Don't be a fool, Roland, I'm all right! But this—this is horrible. Tell me all about it."

Roland then told him all the tale. Auburn said nothing while it was unfolding, except for a low exclamation when Roden's share in it came out. Finally he asked, "What will they do to her?"

"Four or five years at the outside, Maine thinks. There's no evidence against her except her own confession, and the circumstances were not far short of technical justification."

"I grudge my freedom at such a price, though."

"You need not say that, Auburn. I'm sure that unhappy woman is happier than she has been for years."

Auburn nodded. "And Roden Carminow, too, has known all along! He's had rather a poor time of it."

"I can't pity him. He was not justified in such a concealment."

"But he couldn't prove anything."

"Not directly: but I suspect Lesbia would have given herself away under cross-examination. In any case, a very slight element of alternative suspicion would have secured your acquittal. Carminow was utterly wrong."

"I don't know," said Auburn, pondering. "He had

given his word: he was told that a woman's reputation depended on it: and he could not be sure that Lesbia was guilty. It is all clear enough to us, but to him it must have been a dark problem. What, after all, was the evidence against her? That she was out of her house at midnight and did not want it known! Do you call that proof? It does not even supply a motive. It is much less than the evidence against me."

"He doesn't deny that he felt convinced of Lesbia's guilt. He went to her after the trial and had it out with her face to face."

"And she denied it, I'll be sworn: I know Lesbia."

"Yes, she did: but he can't pretend that he believed her."

"I dare say: but he had no right to break his word and risk a woman's name, on the strength of a mere intuition."

"Sophistry, Auburn! You defend him because you like him. He knew Lesbia had done it, and he ought to have spoken out. Better break the letter of truth than the spirit: and so I told him."

"What, have you been down on him? O righteous wrath! I wish I'd heard the interview, it was probably funny. What did you say?"

Roland's mouth was set, hard and angry. "I gave him my opinion of fanatics who save their own souls at other men's expense."

"But think," said Auburn, "what a devil-ridden life the man must have led all these four years!"

"You may forgive him: you've so much to forgive."

"I see both sides. You wouldn't have had him lie to save me: then why should he break a promise?"

"A promise so made is invalid."

"Well, well," said Auburn philosophically, "it's a point on which probably no two people would ever agree, for it turns on the question, not of facts, but of taste. You'll be surprised to reflect, my good Puritan, that you're on the

side of the Jesuits—they hold that the end justifies the means. For me and Roddy, I suspect we've got Paul of Tarsus to back us up: he was one of those who see the infinite unimportance of human happiness."

Towards noon they ran into Yeovil, and drew up before a quiet inn where Roland had already engaged rooms. So secretly and swiftly had Auburn's release been effected that the journalists were not even now on his track, and they were able to lunch together undisturbed. Auburn tried to read the paper over his mayonnaise and cucumber, but threw it down with an impatient sigh. "It's all Greek to me," he said. "Who's running Crete now, and what are taxies?" Later, on their way to the station (he had expressed a wish to go on foot), Roland was startled to find the seasoned Londoner reduced to a babe's nervousness in the moderate traffic of a provincial town. Auburn concealed it as long as he could, but between a dogcart, two bicycles, and a motor cycle, his nerve gave way altogether, and he clutched at Roland's arm. People stared after the tall man with the ill-cut clothes and the cropped head, who had so nearly got himself run over. Soon, however, they were locked into a reserved carriage and whirling towards the east. The white country fled by, and Auburn sat at the window looking out. Roland, sitting opposite and affecting to read, wondered what thoughts were passing behind the set, hard features, for Auburn's face had lost its gay mobility. That he was thin and pale marked far less vividly the distinction between free man and convict than this change from animation to stillness. At length, turning round, he met Roland's anxious tender eyes, and frowned impatiently.

"Don't stare at me as if I were a wild beast, man!"

"I was only wondering how you contrived to live through those years."

Auburn stretched out his hand and laid one finger on a scar that seamed his wrist. "I got that in the stone quar-

ries at Princetown. It won't wear away in a day, will it?"

"No, nor in a lifetime."

"Other scars cut deeper than that. Yet they're only flesh wounds after all. I dare say it will be a week or so before I make a pun: but you needn't look at me as if I'd been bitten by a mad dog, and you were expecting rabies to develop at any moment!"

"You know, old boy, I haven't the least idea what you mean."

"I'm not very clear myself. I believe I was fishing to know whether—— Look here, I want you to tell me truth. Am I much changed?"

"You've lost some of your beauty-looks."

"Confound you for a fool! Do I look like a convict?"

"Your hair does. What *do* you mean, Auburn?"

"Here's what I mean, in plain English. Do I look—as if—the—the degradation—the—oh God! you don't know what I mean." He stopped, deliberately crushing down the plain truths that rose to his lips. "Wait: don't touch me. Why do you look at me as though I were a wild beast? I don't feel much changed: but one can't judge oneself. Is there any change in me that people—a woman—that *she* would shrink from?"

"I think I'll leave her to answer that."

"Oh, she's loyal: she'd hold on like grim death, if it were like death to hold on. But I've been among such things—Brutes and devils! Ought I to bring the contact with such things into her life?—I'm not exaggerating. Those nights! I've never been a saint, and you're not a child: but I could not own to you one tenth part of the things I thought of, the black rottenness of one's mind through those deathly nights at Portland. One could only curse God and die. No, I can't make you see it, I suppose. Look here: if I had spent these last months in ordinary low sensuality, in drunkenness and riotous living, you would think that changed the case, wouldn't you? Say she

were your sister—you wouldn't hand her over to a vicious man?"

"But you're not vicious, and you never were."

"Oh! you're no good."

He leaned back and said no more, while Roland, anxious and perplexed, wondered what it was all about. Celt though he was, Roland was incapable of following the erratic movements of Auburn's ill-regulated brain, which dragged him down to the level of the lowest brute in Portland, or up to those heights of the fanatic and fantastic where a man may break his own life on the rack of the ideal. Roland's homely morality knew not how to deal with sins of the imagination. Love sometimes takes the place of tact, however, and the loyal comrade glanced at his watch.

"Half-past four: we're punctual. The train gets to Stanton Mere at five-fourteen, and Grace Trevor's to meet us at the station, so we shall get to the Hall in easy time for you to have it out with Miss Carminow before dinner. They don't dine till eight in the winter, and you're to be excused from dressing if you don't want to. You'll find Piers ready to valet you, though: he threw up his place at a week's notice to be ready when you came out, so the Trevors said they'd put him up. The Trevors have been awfully nice to Miss Carminow. I was talking to her yesterday in the library—you remember what a jolly room it is? She sat on the rug in the firelight and made me tell her details of our prospective journey to-day. She's prettier than ever, you know: you should have seen her with the light on her hair. After all, though, you will see her in three-quarters of an hour or so . . ."

Life began to grow familiar, habit to spin its webs of merciful oblivion over Auburn as he listened.

The train ran into Stanton Mere by the new loop-line at a quarter-past five. They stepped out into the darkness of a frosty winter's night, spangled with stars, which

burned and twinkled in the great arch of heaven. Beyond the gas-lamps of the little station stretched away the milder illumination of unbroken fields of snow. As they stood on the platform, a figure in a short tweed skirt, furs, and big boots came up, holding out a furred hand.

"Oh, here you are! Never mind the luggage, Brown will see to it. How d'ye do, Mr. Auburn? Hurry up, please, the mare's fresh to-night."

Grace led the way into the station yard, where Brown stood holding the chestnut mare, his red impassive face and her cloudy breath lit by the glare of the lamps in the dog-cart. "You behind, Mr. Carew," sang out Grace, springing to the box-seat. "Will you sit by me, Mr. Auburn?—One portmanteau and a bag, Brown. All right!"

Brown let go the mare, and they dashed out over the crisp, frozen snow. Grace was a first-rate whip, but the chestnut taxed her wrists and gave her little chance of talking. Apparently she was not otherwise embarrassed. Once or twice she threw a word to Auburn, or over her shoulder to Roland. "You're looking thin," she said, flashing her keen eyes over Auburn's face as they whirled past the blazing windows of a public-house. "You haven't been seedy, have you?"

"Rather not!"

"I expect they don't give you enough to eat. I say, I hope you like boiled chicken? Dodo said you did, and I thought it had better be something light and digestible."

"Awfully kind of you, I'm sure," said Auburn politely. "It sounds ambrosial."

"I didn't want to make you——" Grace began, but a caprice of the mare diverted her attention, and the rest of the sentence was lost. "I wouldn't let Dodo meet you on the platform. She rather wanted to, but it's so beastly public. What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing, except the way you haven't changed. My dear Grace, you'll certainly have the gatepost down!"

They were at the gate of Trevor Hall, and the mare smelled her stable. Her dash into the avenue grazed the near wheel, and nearly threw Roland into the road. Grace perhaps was not so cool, nor her hand so steady, as she pretended.

"Let me take the reins," Auburn demanded: "you can't hold her, she's bolting."

"Yes, I can," Grace retorted defiantly. Meanwhile the mare flew on up the avenue. Their approach was heard, for the big doors burst open as they drew up, and the figures of Sir George and his wife appeared silhouetted against a brilliant interior. Sir George came down the steps to help his daughter out, while a footman ran to the mare's head.

"Ha, Gracie! got 'em all right? That's good. How d'ye do, Sir Charles? I'm very glad indeed to see you." He gave Auburn a firm and steady hand-clasp, then turned to Roland, while Auburn stumbled forward, half dazzled by the glare after such long darkness. Next Lady Trevor held out both hands to the wanderer. Something in his face as he stood on the threshold touched her very heart: she drew him down to her and kissed him.

"Dear, dear boy," she said, as if she had been his mother, "my poor Charles, how worn you look! Never mind, all's well that ends well."

Auburn could not trust himself to answer. She patted his shoulder once or twice with a soft, soothing touch.

"There, there! I mustn't keep you now, my dear. Dodo is in the library, and of course you want to go to her."

She held open the door of the big, shadowy, firelit room for him to go in. By the time Roland Carew and Grace had extricated themselves from their rugs and were in the hall, it was closed again, and Lady Trevor was unaffectedly drying her eyes with a lace pocket-handkerchief.

"Is Charles with Dodo?" Grace asked in her most nonchalant way as she pulled off her gloves.

"Yes, darling. I couldn't bear to keep him from her for a second. Poor boy, he was nearly crying, I think."

Grace stood defiant in the light of the hall lamps. Tears welled up into her eyes and brimmed them: her breast shook with a sudden uncontrollable sob. Lady Trevor was too wise to be sympathetic, and contented herself with taking Roland away: but Roden was less wise.

"I say, is everybody in tears?" he inquired, strolling forward with his hands in his pockets. "Here's a gay welcome! What's the matter, Gracie?"

"Nothing," said Grace crossly. "I always cry at a wedding."

"You'll weep profusely at your own. May I be there to see!" was Roden's cheerful aspiration. "I say, shouldn't you like to peep through the keyhole?"

"No, I shouldn't."

Roden put up his eyebrows. "Don't be captious! Are your principles opposed to kissing? I've heard it's nice."

"I'm going to dress for dinner."

Grace turned on her heel and went off, while Roden wondered why she was so cross. Ultimately he set it down to the effect of emotion on the ill-balanced feminine temperament. "She's a good sort—Gracie," he reflected. "I'm surprised she hasn't married. She's twenty-seven, and looks every day of it." He glanced at the closed door of the library, and Grace and her whimsicalities vanished from his mind. "I wonder if Auburn will deign to speak to me. He must hate me pretty cordially—like that long-legged, stiff-necked descendant of Balaam's ass, Roland Carew. Four years in a convict prison, and eighteen days in a condemned cell—and he knows I could have saved him by a word! It's so incredibly, fantastically disproportionate: I don't wonder Dodo casts me off. Yet, in God's name, if it had to be done over again to-morrow, I'd do it. . . . But I doubt I'm not the most popular member of the Carminow family at present."

Late that night, when Roden was in bed and trying to get to sleep, there came a soft tap on his door and he heard some one enter the room. "Who's there?"

"Me."

Roden drew in his breath sharply. "What on earth do you want, Dodo?"

She felt her way to the bed and sat down on the foot of it. "I say," she said, after a momentary pause, "we're going to have a swagger wedding."

"White satin and orange blossoms?"

"Well, I'm not going to be married in sackcloth and ashes."

"Too reminiscent of the broad arrow—eh?"

Dodo wriggled. "Don't be a pig. I say."

"I know you do. I wish you wouldn't. It's nearly three o'clock."

"No, *don't* be a pig, Roddy."

"Well, what is it?"

"Oh well: he says you were right, and I believe you were from your own point of view, though not from mine."

"That's very forgiving of you both," said Roden dryly.

"I suppose you feel you can afford to be generous."

"Don't be rancorous, there's a dear boy."

"Well——" said Roden, yielding. Rancor was, in truth, an emotion not foreign to his nature, and Dodo had wounded his very deeply, but he loved her better than anything else in the world, and could understand her love for Auburn, and the elemental passion which the thought of so intolerable a wrong had fired in her. "Of course women never do appreciate a point of honor. One can't expect it of their limited souls."

"Oh no—all right," assented Dodo. "Anything you like, only you're to forgive me. We've all suffered so frightfully over this business, I do want to cry quits: I'm tired of pain."

"None of us comes out of it unscarred," said Roden. "I

dare say we all feel, like the cook in *Candide*, that our scar is the worst."

"I know: that's what Grace says."

"What does Grace say?"

"That you had the hardest time of the lot of us."

"The dickens she does! Sensible girl, Gracie—shrewd eye for character. I wish you'd go to bed."

"All right, I will," said Dodo, getting down. But when she was halfway to the door she suddenly came back and hugged him. "Oh, Roden, I could shake you! what a blind idiot you are! But I love you all the same."

"I'll be shot if I know what this child means!" said Roden.

XXXII.

EVENING was coming down over the grassy ledges of the Plain: a warm March evening, one of those windy lavender twilights that set the sap running in branch and bud. Sitting on a heap of stones, Dodo looked out over the fall of the open country between the grey headlands, and watched the lamps lighting in the homes of men below.

She knew her land so well that she could give the name to many a lamplit home. The Trevors' house she could not see, it lay too immediately below her: but the Vicarage lights were plain, and one of them marked the gable of her own old room. Much water had flowed under the bridge since Dodo had last slept within those walls. Ah, sunlit days, quiet and careless nights! Much farther off, on the ridge of a hill, sparkled the casements of the Chantry Farm, Bernard's place, where Auburn, a week since, had taken up his lodging. This was the last evening of Dodo's unmarried life.

"I am going to be married to-morrow," she said to herself, and she drew off her glove and looked at her small hand, on which Auburn's great emerald flashed alone, for she had not allowed him to give her other jewels. Her grey half-mourning dress was shabby after a winter's wear, she had pulled off her astrakhan cap, and the wind was blowing through her fair, loosened hair: she looked less than twenty-two, absurdly childish and immature. So indeed thought Auburn, who had been dispatched to find her, and mounted the steep hill path whistling like a blackbird till he came in sight of her, when his tune fell silent. He threw himself on the stunted turf at her feet, looking up at her with keen,

merry eyes. "What are you doing here all alone? Grace sent me to bring you down to dinner."

"I was thinking."

"What about—me?" Dodo gave him a demure smile. "You little schoolgirl! Why are you looking sixteen to-night, Dodo? It's not decent; a man mayn't marry his granddaughter." She touched his cheek with her gloved forefinger. "That's all very fine, but I want to know what mischief you were hatching. Come, confess! am I not your lord and master?"

"Not till to-morrow," Dodo pointed out. "After that I shall do everything you tell me, you may be sure, darling. You are quite sure, aren't you?"

"Oh, quite," said Auburn, with a fleeting grimace. "No, my love, I entertain no delusions on that score: I am resigned to your wearing the br—I mean, I recognize that the ideal marriage state is one of mutual independence. But you needn't ride me on the curb." He put up his own hand over hers, and drew it to his lips. "I want to know what you were thinking about when I came up."

"I was thinking that I shall probably never wear darned gloves again."

"Dear me! What a profound reflection! But why?"

"Because I shall have to be Lady Auburn, with several thousands a year and a duty to my position. Oh, you may laugh, but it's serious! Roland was preaching to me last night. He wants you to stand for Parliament."

"Wants me to stand for Parliament—me! Bless the man! why, what does he suppose I know about politics?"

"Nothing. He wants me to coach you."

"I'll clout his head for him!" said Auburn, resentful. "Why, what do *you* know about politics? a baby of fifteen!"

"A good deal: and I agree with Roland. I dare say you could get in if you tried. You haven't any principles, and Roland says you can speak. He wants you to rent a coun-

try house, and become a model landlord. You won't, but I shall be a model landlady, and no one will know the difference."

"Much obliged! Did you settle whether I was to be a Tory or a Labor member?"

"Not a Labor member: one must study *vraisemblance*. I said a Tory, because you and Roland could always pair when you wanted to get off: but he said he thought if you were anything you were a Liberal. Seriously, Charles, you've lived a shamefully idle life up till now. You ought to do something." Auburn was silent, but looked restive. "We can't wander about Europe for ever, and politics is great fun: you would like it if you once took it up."

"What am I to take up—prison reform?" Dodo did not answer, but a drawn look came suddenly about her mouth. "There, I am a brute! My darling, I'll do anything you like. Command me, you and Roland between you: if you'll write my speeches, I'll get 'em up." His shrewd eyes scanned her, dissatisfied. "Still not happy? What's wrong, dearest?"

"You are, I think."

"Why, you're hard to content! What more can I do? Haven't I promised to obey orders when you're pleased to issue them?"

"Did I ever ask you to obey orders?"

"Don't know, I'm sure: you issue them pretty frequently. What is it, then—do you want me to take it on myself?"

"I want you to do as you like," Dodo answered warily.

"And I like to do as you tell me."

"But I'd rather——"

"Ah! but we can't have all we want in this life."

There was silence for a few moments—Dodo picking a bent of grass to pieces, Auburn turning his face towards the darkening west.

"I'll tell you what you want," he said at length, wheel-

ing round on her so abruptly that she dropped the broken stem. "You want Lesbia out of prison, and Jeannie out of her grave, and Roden to marry Grace, and that bit of grass to be growing on its stalk again, and these four years to be wiped out as though they'd never been. Eh? You won't have your wish, my love."

"Shan't I?"

"Lesbia won't live to come out of prison, Jeannie's dead and done for, Roden won't marry Grace if he lives to be a hundred, and I——"

"And you, Charles?"

"I—oh, I shall be charmed to go into politics, if you'll fix things up with the wire-pullers."

"You mean——"

"I mean that I love you," said Auburn passionately. ". . . oh, I'll do my best, Dodo, I swear to you I will!"

There came back to Dodo's mind the day, less than twelve months ago, when she had first set eyes on Princetown Prison. Auburn's broken words, and still more his look, woke in her the same poignant, irrevocable sorrow, the very anguish that had ended then in tears: but there was no time for tears now. Almost without perceptible pause she bent over him, smiling, and touched his lips with her lips. "Dear darling, I'm sorry. I spoke too soon. We'll talk about it again when you've had six months on the Mediterranean."

"It won't make any difference."

"Won't it? Then I'll write your speeches and fix up the wire-pullers for you. It won't be bad fun when it comes to the point: there's nothing you'd like better than a contested election."

"And if I do get in, what am I to do? It isn't even a respectable career! I shall never make a good party man, and I've no fad of my own."

"You might do worse than what you said."

"Eh?"

"Prison reform."

"I'd sooner be flayed alive."

Dodo smiled. "You wouldn't care a snap of the fingers."

"No! do you think so?" said Auburn, astonished. "I'm not sure you're not right, it would be so very transpontine. Expert opinion with a vengeance! It's in the air, too: one really might have a chance of being useful. Heaven knows there's enough wants doing—I should die happy if I thought I'd helped to save a few poor brutes from that initial solitary confinement."

"All things work together for good," said Dodo with a touch of cynicism.

She jumped up, tossing her cap on her disordered curls. "Br-r-! turn your coat collar up, it's getting very chilly. Let's go down, I shan't have time to dress for dinner."

"This time to-morrow we shall be on the sea," said Auburn. He stood for a moment bareheaded, looking out over the valley. "All things work for good, do they? Well, the future is on the knees of the gods: but as for the past, taking it all in all, you and Sir Charles, Provincetown and to-morrow, I'm glad I came to Stanton Mere."

The wind had grown cold, and the night was falling fast. "How misty it grows!" said Dodo. "Give me your hand, Charles, I can hardly see the path."

THE END

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